

Towns County Herald

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Towns County Basketball honors senior players Feb. 4

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In the Feb. 4 basketball game against Lake Oconee Academy, Towns County High School held a very special commemorative celebration honoring its upcoming graduating senior players.

The senior spotlight was held between the ladies and boys' games Friday night, with each being escorted to half-court by their parents and other family members to receive gifts of miniature basketballs, a rose bouquet and individualized collage posters highlighting each player's career.

Graduating Lady Indian are Emily Var-

gas and Payten Calvert, and graduating Paydens are Collin Crowder, Kyle Oakes, Dade Joyner, Cabe Poston and Zion Henderson.

Crowder, who has been playing basketball in Towns County for 12 years, said the occasion was bittersweet, and he advised his younger counterparts, "Don't take anything for granted."

"(Becoming a senior) happened so quick, and you make so many memories," Crowder said. "You don't lose the memories, but you just don't get any chances to make any more, so take every chance you can to make a memory so you can keep it forever."

After graduation, Crowder is hoping to attend a college to play baseball or

football, and he also wants to attain an electrical apprenticeship through North Georgia Technical College.

Cabe Poston has been playing for 10 years, and as a Class of 2022 senior, he has enjoyed being a leader among his teammates.

"It was nice to see the younger kids look up to me so they can learn how to be a role model for the younger kids behind them," Poston said, adding he would like to be a construction manager after graduation and attend school for management to one day run his own business.

Kyle Oakes, a player for 12 years, said he was sad to be leaving, but that "it is very cool having all of our team look up

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Towns County High School Varsity Basketball Seniors Kyle Oakes, Collin Crowder, Dade Joyner, Cabe Poston, Zion Henderson, Emily Vargas and Payten Calvert on Feb. 4 Senior Night. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

TCHS health care students visit Health Department

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Some of Towns County's upcoming and coming health care practitioners took an informative field trip to the Towns County

Health Department on Tuesday, Feb. 1, that offered a bit of insight into what they may find themselves working with in the future.

Towns County High School Health Sciences Teacher Sarah Vardo brought her class

of five students to the Health Department in order to learn from Dr. Melinda Dolphyn, an expert on tuberculosis.

"The Health Department serves the community, so anything we can do, any

See Health Care Students, Page 8A



Students in the Health Care Pathway of Towns County High learned all about tuberculosis at the Health Department last week, even taking a special skin test checking for TB as part of the experience. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Honaker speaks on second chances with Drug Court

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Friday, Feb. 4, members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed Barbara Honaker, court coordinator and

director of the North Enotah Drug Court, to their weekly breakfast meeting at the Sundance Grill in Hiwassee.

The Movers and Shakers are a nonpartisan civic organization dedicated to serving the

North Carolina and Western North Carolina mountain region with important information and outlets to perpetuate the well-being of the surrounding communities.

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L-R: Movers & Shakers Emcee William "Scotty" Scott, Advocate Josh Passmore, Drug Court Coordinator Barbara Honaker, and Movers & Shakers Emcee Michael Borkman. Photo by Jeremy Foster

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See Drug Court, Page 6A

Georgia Chamber president forecasts economic future

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Georgia Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Chris Clark was the keynote speaker at the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Eggs & Issues Breakfast Meeting and Tourism Forecast at the Community Center on Wednesday, Feb. 2.

"We spent all of last year coming out of COVID-19," Clark said. "We traveled the state, we talked about the future of Georgia's economy, the impact of COVID. And we asked about 50 different questions of



Chris Clark
Georgia Chamber President

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FBLA kids compete at Regional Leadership Conference



Congratulations to the Towns County Future Business Leaders of America for their performances at the recent Regional Leadership Conference. Photo/Submitted

News Special
Towns County Herald

Twenty-three Towns County High School Future Business Leaders of America students competed at regional level competitions during January 2022.

Five of these students finished First Place in the region, and 16 of these competitors will advance to state level competition in March.

The students were: Kya

Smith – Sales Presentation; Callie Drew Livingston – Introduction to Business Presentation; Ansleigh Hardin – Introduction to Business Presentation; Brooke Murrell – Word Processing; Eden Hill – Spreadsheet Applications; Dhriti Patel – Introduction to Business Communication and Word Processing; Eli Phillips – Impromptu Speaking; Will McConnell – Computer Applications; Abby

Smith – Sales Presentation;

Morgan Pierson – Graphic Design; Bazya Smith – Public Speaking; Jacey Wood – Spreadsheet Applications and Accounting; Laura Cauldin – Accounting; Brant Youngblood – Introduction to Financial Math; and Nick Pyrluk – Introduction to Financial Math.

These young people have represented our school and community well. Congratulations to all!

Snow Family thankful for Habitat home selection



The Snow family, center, was overjoyed to learn last week that they had been selected to partner with the local Habitat for Humanity for the nonprofit's next home build, to be located near the county line in Towns County. Photo by Madelyn Bailey

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties Inc. thrilled a local family on Feb. 1 by welcoming them to a surprise announcement at the Habitat ReStore.

Every year or so, the local Habitat starts its selection process of partnering with a family to build a "forever home" and get them set up for long-term success.

Announced in last Tuesday's celebration, this year's family partner is Brandy Snow, mother of sons Wyatt Mcrae and Elijah Snow. At the ReStore, surrounded by her new friends from Habitat, Snow was overcome with joy and

emotional testimony.

"I am nervous but very excited for this opportunity," said Snow, a Union County native. "This means everything to me, and mainly stability to have a home for the rest of our lives."

"Our current living situation has been very challenging, but I would like to let everyone in our great community know that if anyone has a need, Habitat will come together for you and encourage you the whole way through."

"Never be afraid to accept humility when you need help the most, and just please stay positive and never give up."

Habitat is a nonprofit organization that partners with fu-

ture homeowners to build safe, decent and affordable homes for working families.

Getting started in a home can be exceedingly difficult for families that have struggled to secure adequate housing in the past, especially given the current rise in limited housing availability.

Qualifying homeowners must be able to afford the home being built for them, with Habitat greatly facilitating the ownership process, from assisting with loan paperwork to recruiting volunteers to build the home at cost.

Since beginning in 1996, the local Habitat has succeeded in building homes for more than 20 families in Towns and

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**Quilt of
Valor
Recipient**

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**Iwo Jima
Memorial
Service
Feb. 21**

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Basketball Seniors...from Page 1A

to you.”
 “We are leaving behind a good group of guys that know what they are doing,” Oakes said, acknowledging the skill and hard work put in by the team’s younger players. Oakes is interested in getting a sports management degree, building a family and just living life.
 Crowder, Oakes and Poston were all members of the 2020-21 team that won the school’s first Georgia High School Association Class A Public State Championship in basketball – a feat they hope to be able to duplicate this year.
 Boys Head Coach Brian Hunnicutt shared his feelings on the men who are graduating, noting that “it has been a phenomenal group.” Hunnicutt is familiar with both the boys and girls’ teams, having transitioned from Girls Head Coach to Boys Head Coach this year.
 “You meet certain people in your life that you take

with you for the rest of it, and this group of both boys and girls has been that special,” Hunnicutt said. “They have left a great foundation and shoes to fill with a high watermark these younger kids can try to attain to. All of their success has been on them, and I am fortunate to just have been along for the ride.”
 Emily Vargas has been a player of 11 years, and she said it will be hard leaving the Lady Indians “because they are like a second family to me.”
 “They have been with me through the ups and downs inside and outside of basketball, so I am going to miss them a lot,” she said. Vargas has her sights set on going to the University of North Georgia and majoring in business.
 Payten Calvert has been playing for seven years. She plans on attending Young Harris College for an English degree to become an English

teacher.
 “It is awesome being a senior,” Calvert said, “but I am really sad having to leave an awesome group of girls, because they have grown to be family, but I would say that it is important to live in the moment and enjoy them with everyone you are around.”
 Girls Head Coach Shea Taylor said the most important thing he had to say about his Lady Indian seniors was that “they have been the ultimate leaders of the team this year.”
 “They have been ultimate encouragers by talking with their teammates and leading by example,” Taylor said. “When the going went to tough, they never laid down and quit, and good leadership on a team is hard to find, and I appreciate everything they have done for this team.”
 Congratulations to the upcoming graduating Indian and Lady Indian seniors.

Rebecca Baker named the 2022 Woodward Scholar at Young Harris College

Rebecca Baker, 2023, of Dacula, GA, was recently awarded the Beverly Barrow Woodward, 1953, Endowed Scholarship. This scholarship was established by Leonard and Beverly Woodward of Rome, Georgia, and it is granted annually to one YHC student to study abroad in England at Harlaxton College.
 “We want to thank the Woodward family for their continued support of students who desire to broaden their world-view and expand their educational experience beyond the Enchanted Valley,” said Dr. Jennifer Schroeder, associate professor of biology and coordinator of international studies at YHC.
 Criteria for the Woodward Scholarship include a strong academic record, a compelling application essay, and a successful interview that convinces the committee that the student is mature and resourceful enough to have a rich educational experience and to be an excellent ambassador of YHC. The selection committee for this award included Dr. Nathan Gray, Dr. Mary Slavkin, Dr. Larissa Stiglich, and Dr. Jennifer Schroeder. They explained that Baker was chosen from



Rebecca Baker
 a very strong candidate pool. She impressed the committee with her involvement in and service to the campus community, and they are confident that she will be a strong representative of the College during her travels and studies in England.
 “I am so incredibly fortunate to receive the Woodward Scholarship, and I cannot wait to see where the experience of studying abroad takes

me,” said Baker. “Travel, especially international travel, is something I’ve wanted to do my entire life, and I am beyond excited to fulfill this dream. I look forward to experiencing a different country and its culture for the first time in my life.”
 Baker will be studying British Literature while abroad, and she plans to visit the London and Nottingham areas. She looks forward to exploring the Globe Theater and the Natural History Museum in London.
 “The courses Rebecca will be taking at Harlaxton College will complement her studies at YHC very well, enabling her to enhance the learning environment for her future classmates upon her return,” said Schroeder.
 Baker is a junior creative writing major with a minor in philosophy. She is a tutor in the Young Harris College Success Center, where she cultivates her writing skills. She is also Vice President of the College’s Indoor Club.
 After graduating, she plans to have a career in writing articles and reports for nonprofits. She also plans to make a name for herself as a fiction author.

Snow Family...from Page 1A

Union counties, and the Snow family is a welcome addition to the mix.
 Charlotte Randall is the Vice President of Operations for Towns/Union Habitat for Humanity, and she said the local chapter is “overdue for a build.”
 “We do this with the help of volunteers and experienced home builders and contractors,” Randall said. “The families that we help get houses at cost, so they still hold a mortgage, but they get the house at cost rather than us profiting from them.”
 “We had approximately 20 families fill out the application (this go round), and our selection process considers certain factors based on dire need and is income-based as well.”
 “We do have to take into account credit score, as we are now servicing our loans through the USDA. Candidates need to display two years of financial stability showcasing their intention to improve their

overall financial health.
 “The house will be located right on the Union/Towns County line, and many things are in place already to start the build.”
 “We would like to thank one of our sponsors, Marina Station, for hosting a spaghetti dinner on March 2 for kicking off the family selection fundraiser, with more details to come for that.”
 “As of now, this project is an annual process, but Habitat has a plan and is looking at new and different ideas to be able to do more in the future.”
 “We also have a Helping Hands program that is helping families that may need assistance with weatherization and other things that have to do with their house.”
 “We have done six Helping Hands projects this past month, which is more than we did throughout all of last year, so we are really trying to kick that off.”

Referencing the local Habitat’s motto here – “a hand up, not a handout” – Randall said those selected must have a good ability to partner with Habitat and be able to put in volunteer work that equates to 400 “sweat equity hours” toward the construction of their home.
 “Our ultimate goal is to become more of a community focal point for resources in the county to help with any number of needs, whether it is food, housing and whatever people may need,” Randall said. “We want everyone to know that we are here to help.”
 For information on how to volunteer or to seek assistance for yourself or a loved one, call 706-745-7101, email operations@townsunionhabitat.org, and visit the website at townsunionhabitat.org.
 And to donate to the home building fund, people may call, email or stop by the Habitat ReStore at 225 Well-born Street in Blairsville.

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Drug Court...from Page 1A

Honaker is dedicated to helping people earn second chances in life should they find themselves in unfortunate circumstances with substance abuse. This includes people who are lost, families in crisis, those suffering broken homes, and people needing guidance, support and structure.
 Specifically, she helps folks in the court system who have attained drug violations and need support pursuing alternative methods to incarceration.
 “Drugs are a rising problem in this area,” Honaker said, “and we work closely under the authority of the Superior Court to help people struggling through addiction (by offering) certain programs so they can avoid having to go to prison.”
 “Our main branch is the adult felony court, which is a little more restrictive, because we make them really work hard to achieve passing through the different phases of the program.”
 “A lot of times our participants are not hardened criminals and not the type of person you would think really

deserves to go to prison, but they do require help in their mental state, because maybe they just came from a very bad upbringing or have deep emotional problems.
 “We are a court of second opportunity and second chances. We give them the opportunity to better themselves, totally get off drugs and be completely clean and sober, which is our ultimate goal of drug court.”
 “We also teach them how to manage a budget, raise their children if they are parents, and become productive citizens in the community. We require our participants to have full-time jobs, as well as pay \$35 per week for their classes.”
 “They start off with four classes per week that are two hours long, and they work their way up until the point of being released and graduate back into independence and become the person they were meant to be.”
 “It is amazing to see from the day they enter to the day they leave how much their personality changes for the better.”
 Honaker brought along

Josh Passmore, a young advocate and mentor for people struggling through addictions. Passmore is currently going to college to be a pastor, and after suffering through 13 years of addiction, he stopped by to share his testimony.
 “I got myself to a point where I was addicted to three different drugs, my family was leaving me, I quit my job because I was on the run from the law, and after a time my actions really started crashing down,” he said. “I came to a place of being suicidal and broken inside, and it became too much, and all of a sudden I found myself saved with answers from the Lord.”
 “I eventually turned myself in, and from grace from Jesus Christ I did not go to prison, and now I am a completely different person. I would have called you a liar if you had told me a few years ago that I would be the person that I am today.”
 Honaker is located at 49 Blalock Street in Blairsville. People struggling with addiction or who have loved ones in need of help can reach her at 706-781-1318 or northenotah.dcc@gmail.com. For more info, visit northenotahdrugcourt.vpweb.com.



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GA Chamber...from Page 1A

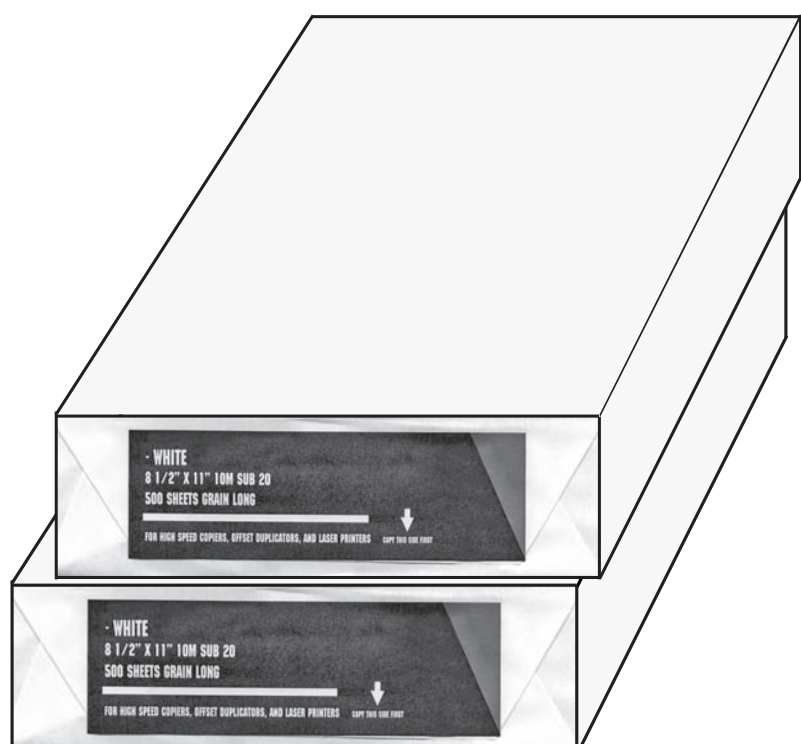
tens of thousands of business leaders around the state.
 “We took their information, and what they said was important to keep this economy going, and we (organized) it into the information we’re going to share with you today. That’s led to our policies that we’re taking before the (Georgia) General Assembly.”
 “It’s our strategy right now. It’s our partnership with the (Georgia) Department of Economic Development.”
 Clark’s presentation covered what the future holds for Georgia but was tailored to fit Northeast Georgia concerning what’s in store for this area economically.
 “Here’s what we heard, here’s the formula right now in the state of Georgia that we need to focus on if we want to continue to grow the state’s economy,” Clark said.
 “It’s no different here than it is in any other state, in any other business. Everyone has a labor shortage right now. The difference is, we’ve got a strategy, and there’s things you can do to win the ‘War for Talent,’” he said, speaking of the current labor shortage.
 “No. 2, we have to continue to innovate in our economy and diversify in our economy. You’re heavily tourism-related up here, but you’re diversifying that with manufacturing, health care; we need more of that.”
 “And the third area is, we’ve got to invest in infrastructure of the future. Here’s the good news: if we do those three things effectively, if we have real strategies locally and at the state level, we can grow the state’s economy about \$70 billion a year every year going forward.”
 Clark said Georgia currently ranks about 16th in the nation for economic diversification, is the eighth largest state in population, and the seventh largest economy.
 Speaking about tourism, certainly the biggest industry in this area, Clark said the state will see a 34% increase in robotics used in tourism in the next five years.
 “Think about that from a restaurant standpoint,” he said. “You’re going to see a lot more technology integrated into tourism. Just like all of our manufacturers invested in automation over the last two years, you’re going to see that happen in the hospitality sector.”
 “Health and wellness will drive hospitality visitation. Millennials are ranking health and wellness, and sustainability

and eco-friendliness as the two top things they are looking for,” Clark said, adding that they will want to see proof of that when deciding where to stay.
 Moving along, Airbnb short-term rentals have been changing the nature of the accommodations market, Clark said, with hotels adopting Airbnb and other platform approaches to adjust how they do business.
 “Bottom line is, everything that you do (from) a tourism standpoint going forward is going to be based on a platform,” Clark said, adding that innovation and economic diversification is the name of the game in today’s hospitality market.
 Changing gears, Clark said Georgia needs to spend \$1.5 billion dollars a year for 30 years “just to get our roads and bridges and railroads up to speed for the demand that’s on the system right now, today.”
 “Because you’re ordering everything online, there literally aren’t enough curbs, and our roads aren’t built for the truck traffic that’s coming into your neighborhoods and going into downtown Atlanta to deliver stuff now. We don’t have a system built for that,” he said.
 Telecommunications is another issue of concern. Last week, Gov. Brian Kemp announced \$430 million dollars’ worth of new investment in broadband and Wi-Fi infrastructure in rural communities, much of which is headed to

Northeast Georgia.
 Kia has recently changed its name, Clark said, from Kia Motors to just Kia, because within five years, they won’t be making gasoline engines any longer. Eventually, gasoline engines won’t be available from anyone because all new vehicles will be electric.
 The point being that the energy industry is changing radically and will impact everything from the local economy to global politics, not the least of which is American infrastructure.
 Health care infrastructure needs to be addressed as well, Clark said, which was proved out by the COVID pandemic.
 “We used to think of health care as a service,” Clark said. “I think COVID showed us that it’s more than that. It’s infrastructure in our communities.”
 Lastly, Clark addressed the shortage of skilled labor, the effects of the dynamic changes driving that shortage, and what, given the new parameters, Georgians can do to reverse that trend.
 Readers are encouraged to access the Georgia Chamber of Commerce website at www.gachamber.com and scroll down to the “War for Talent in Georgia” link for further reading on that subject.
 The breakfast meeting was catered by The View Grill Manager Matt Leonard and his staff, who served two kinds of quiche, scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, French toast, grits, a fruit medley, and biscuits and gravy.

Towns County Community Calendar		
	First Monday of each month:	
School Board	HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
	First Tuesday of each month:	
Hiaw. City Council	City Hall	6 pm
Young Harris City Council	YH City Hall	7 pm
	Second Tuesday of each month:	
Conventions & Visitors Board	Civic Center	8 am
	Second Wednesday every other month:	
Board of Elections	Elections Office	4 pm
	Third Monday of each month:	
Planning Commission	Civic Center	6 pm
Water Board	Water Office	6 pm
	Third Tuesday of each month:	
Commissioner’s Mtg.	Courthouse	5:30 pm

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Health Care Students...from Page 1A

kind of outreach, education for the community, is great, and we are always open to having those kinds of collaborations," Dolphyn said.

Every semester, juniors and seniors who take an advanced class in health care must undergo a TB screen if they plan on furthering their education with an internship.

"So, we just schedule it up here at the Health Department and they do a little presentation," explained Vardo from inside the negative-pressure room that serves as the Health Department's specialty TB exam and treatment center.

The goal is about more than simply preparing medically inclined students for what they may encounter "in the field"; in the bigger picture, it's about bettering the Towns County community by ensuring that its doctors are passionate about their field and recognize their drive early in life.

In this way, students who begin their medical career journeys in high school get a bit of an upper hand when it comes to their instruction, as they receive more time to get acquainted with the various triumphs and difficulties they will likely be facing on the job.

As part of the outreach initiative last Tuesday, Dolphyn presented a slideshow with an accompanying chart of tuberculosis symptoms to the students, who were silenced by their own fascination.

Fortunately, tuberculosis is no longer endemic to the United States, nor is it something that folks in Towns County and the surrounding area should worry too much about.

According to Dolphyn, the local Health Department hasn't seen an active case of tuberculosis in years, though latent tuberculosis pops up "a couple" times a year.

That being said, people should still be aware that the disease exists and is a significant health risk when it does rear its ugly head, generally presenting with feelings of sickness or weakness, weight loss, fever and night sweats, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"TB is still an issue," Dolphyn said. "It is very infectious, and without treatment, it does have a pretty high mortality rate. It is something that needs to be diagnosed early."

Asked what comes to



TCHS Health Sciences Teacher Sarah Vardo with senior Hannah Wecer at the Towns County Health Department last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

mind when they think of TB, most people imagine a deadly lung disease that claimed countless lives as recently as 100 years ago. The truth is there are two kinds of TB, which can settle in anywhere in the body, like the lungs, brain, stomach, kidneys or even the eyes.

The first stage of TB is known as a latent tuberculosis infection, abbreviated as LTBI. It's not infectious and doesn't lead to outward symptoms like coughing or fatigue. Dolphyn likened the LTBI bacteria as "sleeping," considering that they're present in the body but not active.

It is at this point patients diagnosed with LTBI can choose to either accept or deny treatment. About 10% of LTBI patients slip into more dangerous territory when the bacteria "awakens" to become active tuberculosis.

By contrast, active tuberculosis causes symptoms correlating with the area of infection, and sufferers produce sputum or mucus that can very easily infect others.

Dolphyn said that, centuries ago, tuberculosis was known as "consumption," and it becomes easy to understand why when taking note that active tuberculosis patients lose weight rapidly, face organ failure, and gradually waste away as the body appears to consume itself.

In the 21st century, patients with active tuberculosis are required by law to isolate themselves due to the severe health hazard they pose to their community, and for cases of active tuberculosis, treatment is no longer optional.

Because of the risk, patients must take their medication in front of doctors either virtually or in-person to ensure their compliance and prove that they are taking their condition – and subsequently, the health of those around them – seriously.

As for the students in attendance that day, Haley Ledford already works at Union General Hospital and is on the path to becoming a registered nurse. She brought special knowledge of the field to the table for her fellow students, citing the TB test she had to take to land her hospital job.

Ashlyn Awtry was a bit worried about the TB test, but Ledford reminded her of the tiny size of the needle to put her at ease. Awtry looks up to her mother, who went to nursing school, for inspiration. Following in her footsteps, Awtry is motivated by her desire to "help people."

Future funeral director Keenan Henderson began the Health Care Pathway because he was initially interested in sports medicine. Currently, he works at a funeral home and finds that the pathway benefits him because of the inherently human aspect both occupations involve.

And while Galilea Qujada is interested in becoming a professional soccer player, she wants to finish what she started with her chosen pathway in health care. She brought a robust sense of humor to the group, lightening the load when the subject matter got heavy.

Hannah Wecer is using her experience in the Health Care Pathway to jumpstart her pursuit as a future physical therapist or athletic trainer.

All the students saw the significance in the trip, but perhaps Henderson summed it up best, as Wecer said he "took the words right out of my mouth."

"I guess you could say it means a lot," Henderson said. "I mean, these are our futures on the line, these are going to be future career paths. This is going to be someone's future job for almost the rest of their days, so it means a lot learning at that young age."