

# Towns County Herald

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## Towns County High sends 83 graduates to start next chapter in life

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Eighty-three Towns County High School seniors dressed in blue and white gowns to receive their diplomas in front of family and friends during the Class of 2019 Commencement Exercises at Foster Park on Friday, May 24.

In his speech, Valedictorian Kendall Floyd laid out three ideas for his classmates to take away from graduation.

"One, live your dreams but remember your home," said Floyd. "Two, make smart decisions but have fun. And three, weather the storm but don't be afraid to fight back."

Added Floyd, "Do not be afraid to live your dreams. As a graduate of Towns County High School, you have been equipped with the skills to be successful in your chosen field."

At the end of Floyd's speech, he thanked his family,

and his fellow classmates, reminding them again to have fun as they start their new journey in life.

In his salutatory address, Chase Gately thanks to God and all the teachers and coaches that made a lasting impact not only his life but all the lives of his classmates.

Rogers also thanked his family and channeled National Basketball Association star Kevin Durant, saying, "Mom, you are the real MVP."

Historian Emily Williams took a few moments to reflect on the countless memories she and her classmates made throughout their years together at Towns County Schools.

"All of us here today share precious memories, and some of our memories are hard to forget," Williams said.

Following Williams' address, senior Bill Scott performed an incredible blues jam with his electric guitar, and High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs highlighted



Overjoyed graduates of the Towns County High Class of 2019 at the end of Commencement Exercises on Friday, May 24. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

many stories she said she would never forget about the Class of 2019.

"The students don't

remember much about the math concepts I taught them in the sixth grade, but they do remember the relationships that

we built together," said Hobbs. "Relationships are what matter and what we remember."

"This Class of 2019 will

be remembered for their spirit, for their love of the mountains and the lakes. Seniors, you have

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## MECHS hosts inaugural joint graduation ceremony for all 16 sites

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

DAHLONEGA — Mountain Education Charter High School hosted its first ever joint graduation ceremony at the University of North Georgia Convocation Center on Saturday, May 25.

The school features 16 sites in 15 counties across North Georgia, including the Union Site, which consists of students from Union and Towns counties.

"We have students, who have traveled many miles joining us today," said Dr. Joe Cash, Director of School Performance. "These diplomas not only reflect the hard work and determination of these students, but also the support of their families, community organizations, local businesses, MECHS staff, and the MECHS governing board."

Valedictorian Kayla Gray from the Lumpkin Site delivered the 2019 Valedictory Address, telling her classmates to live life without caring what



Jessi Bracken walking at the Mountain Education Charter High School graduation ceremony on May 25. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

others say about them.

"I'm going to study language and linguistics and major in Spanish and possibly minor in Arabic," said Gray.

"Honestly, I plan to use these however the Lord directs me, and right now, I believe He wants me in the mission field, but by three, five, 10 years

down the road, I have no idea where I will be.

"Our whole lives, it has been rammed down our throats to have a plan. But life is what's happening while we are making other plans, so it's okay to make a couple thousand mistakes before we figure out what we

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## Mathis retires after 42 years of service as emergency first responder

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

EMA Director Rickey Mathis has decided to retire after 42 years of service as a first responder and medical professional in Towns County.

In an emotional presentation during the May 21 regular county meeting, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw presented Mathis with a plaque to honor his life's work in the county, thanking him for more than four decades as a public servant.

"Towns County owes him more than I can say or more than I can do," said Bradshaw. "He's been a faithful employee and he's loved this county, he loves his family, he loves the community — this is his home, and it shows in his job, and he has done a wonderful job."

Mathis comes from a family of emergency specialists, having originally served under his father, Jack Mathis, those many years ago when he first got into the first responder business.

"The ambulance service



Towns County EMA Director Rickey Mathis being honored by Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw in the May 21 commission meeting. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

came into the hospital in '71 or '73, and that's when the state started training EMTs and all that," said Mathis. "I started working in '77, and my dad was my boss."

"He was the administrator of the hospital, so he was over the ambulance service and the other departments. I worked for him until '84, and then I went and graduated paramedic

school, and when I got back, they put me in his directory as well."

Working with his father influenced Mathis the field, which would see him serve as the county's first paramedic, as long as the county's first full-time Emergency Management

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## Woodard signs with Young Harris College to cheer as a Mountain Lion

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Sports Editor

Surrounded by family, friends, former and future coaches, teachers and teammates, Towns County senior cheerleader Carly Woodard became the newest member of the Young Harris College Cheer Squad on Tuesday, May 21.

Flanked by her mother, who coached her as Towns County High School Assistant Cheer Coach Lisa Woodard, as well as Young Harris, Carly put pen to paper, choosing to remain local while continuing her academic and athletic careers.

Coach Williams, a native of Rome, was part of the three



Towns County High School senior Carly Woodard signing to cheer for the Young Harris College Cheerleading Squad on May 21. Photo by Todd Forrest

## Hayesville High School senior loses life in tragic drowning accident

News Special  
Towns County Herald

HAYESVILLE, NC — Clay County has lost a friend to all who knew him, a model student, a great athlete and all-around fine young man and citizen who wasn't able to call Hayesville home for nearly long enough.

Steven Plummer had only been a resident of Hayesville for a short time, but the positive impact that he had on the small community is evident by the massive turnout of support in

the days since his passing. The loss felt by his family is shared countywide, and it can be seen and felt throughout the community.

At approximately 3 p.m. on Monday, May 20, Clay County Deputies were dispatched to the area of the TVA Circle near the "saddle dam" off Hinton Center Road in response to a drowning victim, 17-year-old Steven Plummer of Hayesville.

Plummer was a senior

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Steven Plummer

## Union-Towns Special Olympics event celebrates friendship, fun competition



Members of the Towns County Special Olympics team participating in the opening lap at the May 20 event. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Union and Towns Special Olympics took place on Monday, May 20, at the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium in Blairsville.

This event, which was rescheduled this year from April 26 due to rain, serves locals with special needs by putting them in active competitions such as 100-meter dashes and softball throws.

The 2019 Special Olympics kicked off that morning with all the participants excited and ready to be active, beginning with a few 50 and 100-meter dashes divided by different age groups.

Union County High students facilitated the event by acting as scorekeepers for each activity and helping set up each competition.

"I think something like this has a lot of different benefits," said Tiffany Setzer, Special Education Services Director at Union County. "For one thing, it gives them a spotlight to show off the skills that they have."

"It also acts as a way for them to generalize all the skills that they learn in the classroom and working them into an event outside of the classroom. It's supervised by all the teachers, the professionals and their peers."

"So, it is still a safe and

structured environment for them to practice their skills like speech, daily living, and all of those things that they learn in the classroom and work every day."

This event is also beneficial for the Towns County students, who get to spend a day with their friends from Union County as they work together to complete the activities.

"We enjoy this, because it's the time of the year that we get to show some camaraderie with Union County," said Michelle Pyrluk, Special Education Director at Towns County. "We thought we were going to be held off by weather this year, and we had to cancel

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