

University of North Georgia confers Degrees for Spring 2020 graduates

For the spring 2020 semester, the University of North Georgia awarded more than 1,600 degrees and certificates. Ceremonies were canceled due to COVID-19, but UNG hosted a virtual celebration on the UNG commencement website starting May 8, which would have been the first of back-to-back days of commencement ceremonies.

Blairsville graduates include: Mallory Barnett, Bachelor of Science - Elementary and Special Education, Magna Cum Laude; Kaitlyn Day, Bachelor of Science - Elementary and Special Education, Cum Laude; Hunter Hughes, Bachelor of Business Administration - Finance; Brittany Martin, Master of Science - Family Nurse Practitioner; Sierra Porter, Bachelor of Business Administration - Management; Chase Shook, Bachelor of Science - Biology, Summa Cum Laude; Emma Smith, Bachelor of Arts - Modern Languages with a Spanish concentration and business emphasis, Magna Cum Laude; Carlie Tanner, Blairsville, GA, Bachelor of Arts - English with a writing and publication concentration; Marissa Thompson, Bachelor of Science - Sociology; Shana Womack, Bachelor of Science - Elementary and Special Edu-

cation, Cum Laude.

Young Harris graduates include: Lake Arnick, Bachelor of Business Administration - Marketing; Morgan Chandler, GA, Bachelor of Science - Psychology; Andrea Taylor, Bachelor of Science - Psychology.

Morganton graduates include: Robert Corn, Bachelor of Business Administration - Finance; Courtney Cruse, Bachelor of Science - Nursing, Magna Cum Laude; and Lindsey Humphrey, Bachelor of Business Administration - Management.

Haley Aponte, of Suches, GA, Bachelor of Arts - Modern Languages with Arabic language and literature concentration.

Local Georgia Tech Graduates

The Georgia Institute of Technology awarded degrees to approximately 4,050 undergraduate and graduate students at the conclusion of spring semester. Students were celebrated during a virtual celebration held on May 1. They will also be honored during in-person commencement ceremonies to be held on campus later this year.

Among the graduates were: Alice Francis, Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering; Lindsay Hawkins, Bachelor of Science in Biology; Patrick Kelley, Master of Science in Aerospace Engineering; Donald Ward, Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering; Addie Murphy, Bachelor of Science in Biology, all of Blairsville; Dayana Rosas of Morganton, Bachelor of Science in International Affairs; and Michael Austin of Hiawassee, Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering.

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West-Driskell...from Page 1A

gift if you can plant something and just let it grow. It is part of what God does for us every day."

The Butler native made her way to Towns County after years of moving around the world, and she fell in love with the area as soon as she got here, wanting to be part of local organizations and a church in the community.

"We lived in Florida, and I have traveled all my life," West-Driskell said. "I lived from Arizona, Korea, and back to Florida. I have just traveled all my life and lived in different locations."

"We came up here because it was hot, and we made one visit, and my husband was ready to buy that day. We eventually bought a place six months later, and that is how I got here."

"I have been at the Farmers Market, and I am in the Hiawassee Garden Club. We used to do hours and hours on end at the Fair. I got involved ever since we moved here."

"We are part of

McConnell Baptist Church, and I think the most important part of family is church. If you want to make friends, you go to church."

West-Driskell would like for the donation to serve as a statement in the community, which she hopes will visit the gardens more, as many in the area have never been to the trails or even seen the renowned rhododendrons.

Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge is thankful to West-Driskell for her generous donation and plans to use the money to enhance the area near the pavilion, with detailed plans to be determined at a later date.

"The area will be dedicated to her, and there will be an acknowledgment about the donation for her," Hamilton Gardens Executive Director Grace Howard said. "We call the area the great lawn, but it is just a way for us to enhance the other half of the pavilion, and we want to make it a more usable space for people that are visiting."

"Peggy is such a sweetheart, and it was so unexpected for her to do this for us. We are just proud that she remembers us with this."

Due to COVID-19, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge has seen a lack of participation and visitations in recent months, which has caused a significant downturn in donations and funds raised by way of events the group normally holds early in the year.

"Our traffic was down this year," Howard said. "We were not able to record locations this year; we usually keep track and have people sign in. Last year, I had 37 states and 19 countries, and this year, we couldn't track it."

"It has impacted us from the standpoint of less visitors being up here."

The gardens are looking forward to the upgrades the donation has made possible, and like West-Driskell, the organization's members hope to see an increase in local turnout alongside tourist visitations over the coming weeks, months and years.

Reflections from Hamilton Gardens

What is a Volunteer?

The word is defined as "someone who freely offers to support an enterprise or undertakes a task". Towns County is blessed with an abundance of these special people who fit this definition and give regularly of their time. There are a number of nonprofit organizations based in this area and the call is always out for assistance. And that call is answered many times over.

Where do these volunteers come from? They come from different places, in all shapes, sizes and age brackets. Many of our most active volunteers retired to the mountains, thought retirement would be "busy doing nothing". But to their surprise, they found that not to be so interesting after all.

Others worked in the area and upon their retirement found things to do that offered another kind of reward. Volunteers are found on the Young Harris College campus and at Towns County Comprehensive Schools, all looking for ways to make a meaningful contribution to the place they call home. And did you ever notice when you see volunteers providing a service somewhere, you recognize



them from other places where they contribute their time and their skills. They are everywhere, from the Red Cross, the Food Pantry, SAFE, Towns Chamber of Commerce, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, CASA, and on to Hamilton Gardens, just to name a few places that benefit from their participation.

Many of our local organizations depend on their volunteers to supplement staffing. They contribute countless non paid hours to the betterment of this community. Some organizations, such as Master Gardeners (part of the UGA Extension program), track hours annually and affix an average hourly rate to demonstrate the monetary value of their service to the community.

Hamilton Gardens has

an eight-member Board of Directors. Collectively, they volunteer in 12 separate organizations, not counting the time spent in Garden activities.

The Gardens have a small active group of regular community volunteers comprised of those called "Dig" volunteers, who really like to play in the dirt, and "No Dig" volunteers, who contribute in a variety of other ways. A Volunteer Orientation is held the first Friday of each month to arm participants with information to assist them as they support the Gardens' mission in whatever capacity they choose. Garden volunteer hours are totaled annually and are used in funding and grant requests.

The next Garden Volunteer Orientation will be June 5 at 9 a.m. at the Paris Pavilion; call 706-970-0011 to register. If this is not the volunteer opportunity you are seeking, keep looking, there is bound to be one out there.

And to all who volunteer, a heartfelt THANK YOU from every organization who is lucky enough to have you on board.

For more information call the number above, email hamiltongardens.org, or follow us on Facebook.

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The Cancer Foundation adds 6 additional Northeast Georgia counties to our service area



The Cancer Foundation (TCF) announces an important change in our Financial Assistance Program. Effective June 1, 2020, we will offer financial assistance to cancer patients living in Jasper, Lumpkin, Rabun, Towns, Union and White counties. TCF's service area had included a 19-county northeast Georgia area. TCF's Board of Directors unanimously voted to expand the organization's footprint to encompass 25 counties in total at their May 2020 meeting to further our mission to help alleviate the financial burden of cancer for eligible patients.

Board President Jag Gholson explains, "During this time of uncertainty it is more important than ever to address the needs of cancer patients who are struggling financially. The Cancer Foundation Board of Directors feels strongly that cancer patients across northeast Georgia receive support while undergoing treatment."

Since 2009, The Cancer Foundation has provided over \$2.2 million in direct financial assistance to over 3,600 eligible adult cancer patients

in treatment or hospice with basic life needs such as rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, transportation costs and medications. Patients request assistance via referral from their cancer care provider or by contacting TCF for instruction on how to apply.

"The decision to grow now comes in response to requests from the cancer care partners we work with everyday who already treat patients in these areas. While we did discuss the need to increase fundraising efforts to handle the additional needs, our donors always rise to the occasion," says TCF Executive Director Laura Lowery.

Kirk Smith, TCF Board member, was on the board committee that studied whether or not to make the change. "Cancer patients are under more stress than ever during this unprecedented time. The additional counties we studied have no other resource to turn to. There is no time like the present for The Cancer Foundation to step up and do what we can to help."

Floretta Johnson, a TCF Board member and health care social worker with St. Mary's Health System, also recommended the expansion plan. "I

was glad to see us make these changes. It's the right thing to do. As economic conditions worsen for patients and other organizations pull back, we determined that now is the time to act."

The Cancer Foundation is set to host its annual Tri to Beat Cancer event at Sandy Creek Park on Sunday, August 30, 2020 if conditions will allow it take place. If not, an alternate event will take its place. "Either way, we will need the support of the community to continue our program for cancer patients. We've encouraged folks to register now and we will provide a fun experience for everyone while helping our neighbors," says Gabby Dukes, TCF's Assistant Director. Participants can register online at <http://www.cancerfoundation-of-nega.org/events/tri-to-beat>. All proceeds benefit TCF's Financial Assistance Program. Follow The Cancer Foundation on Facebook and Instagram for continued updates!

To apply to The Cancer Foundation's Financial Assistance Program, please contact Katrina Moody at kmoody@cfnega.org. Contact: Gabby Dukes, The Cancer Foundation, 706-353-4354; gdukes@cfnega.org.

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DPH Continues Operation of Specimen Collection Sites



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Nine specimen collection sites operated jointly by the Georgia National Guard and Augusta University will end operations effective May 30 as the university transitions its focus to research and development of new non-invasive testing options like saliva and antibody testing. The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) will continue to operate 136 specimen collection sites throughout the state, and encourages Georgians wanting to be tested for COVID-19 to contact their local health department to schedule an appointment.

During the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic,

the Georgia National Guard and Augusta University joined DPH in its testing efforts by providing a web-based screening and scheduling platform and additional specimen collection sites. To date, more than 44,000 people have been tested at AU Health and partnered sites.

"This partnership with the Guard and Augusta University was invaluable to the COVID-19 response in Georgia," said Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., Georgia Department of Public Health commissioner. "We are grateful for their service to all Georgians, and for the support and capacity they provided DPH to increase testing for COVID-19."

The Guard will continue to provide staffing and logistical help at DPH specimen collection sites, as well as its mission of assisting DPH with testing residents and staff in long-term care facilities. Au-

gusta University will provide ongoing specimen collections at its two sites in the Augusta area; Christenberry Fieldhouse in Augusta and Patriot's Park in Columbia County.

COVID-19 testing is available to all Georgians, whether they have symptoms or not. Individuals wanting to be tested should contact their local health department to schedule an appointment at a location convenient to them. Contact information for local health departments and specimen collection sites can be found on the DPH website at dph.ga.gov. People can also use the AU Health Express-Care app or call the hotline at 706-721-1852 to be scheduled at a DPH or AU Health-operated location.

For more information about COVID-19 visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus> or <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

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