

Graduation...from Page 1A

"As we close this chapter of our lives and begin another, I hope we will always remember the small town we came from, the amazing teachers, parents and mentors who molded us into the people we are today. I hope we always strive to do our best. Live boldly, live fearlessly, but most of all, just live."

Salutatorian Kevin Reardon delivered a light-hearted but poignant speech, thanking all those in attendance and giving everyone a good laugh for the evening.

"The Salutatorian speech is the true middle child of graduation," said Reardon. "The Historian talks about the past and the Valedictorian talks about the future, but what could I possibly talk about?"

"I could talk about the present moment, the moment that is happening before our very own eyes. The very students who have sweated over papers and finals to stand here before their parents and families, who have pushed them to conquer high school - it's crazy to think that every decision we have made has come to this moment."

Reardon also gave a special thank you to all parents and siblings for not only being supportive strongholds throughout the years, but also for believing in the graduates and what the future holds for each of them.

"But students, you deserve the most praise, because no matter what has gone on in your lives, you personally have made it," said Reardon. "We have conquered high school. Your world has been my world. Your fight has been my fight. And your breath has



Towns County High School students turn their tassels going from seniors to graduates on Friday evening at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

been my breath, and we all needed a lot of gum along the way."

Valedictorian and STAR Student Shea Underwood congratulated his fellow classmates on this milestone in their lives, thanking God, family members, friends, teachers and administrators for being the guiding hands throughout their academic careers.

Underwood urged his fellow graduates to use discipline rather than motivation as a staple in the next chapter of their lives, emphasizing the temporary nature of motivation in the long road ahead of them.

"Don't rely on motivation for anything, because motivation is temporary - it is fleeting and motivation is unreliable," said Underwood. "However, discipline is unyielding. Discipline is ever-

lasting. When things get hard and you're not sure if you can finish the race, force yourself to follow through not because you have motivation, but because you have discipline.

"The things that I say up here can only change your life temporarily, because all that I am, all that I'm offering to you, is motivation. True change comes from a conscious effort, with a foundation deeply rooted in discipline."

"Find something you love, something that always makes you happy, and never let that go. Don't procrastinate. Let your life be shaped by the decisions that you make, not by the ones that you didn't. My friends of our Class of 2016, as you slide down the wooden rail of life, may all the splinters be facing in the right direction."

Freshmen...from Page 1A

Middle School Principal Erica Chastain. "Today, you, Towns County Middle School eighth-graders, officially become high school students."

"We are very proud of you and believe in your success. Life is a continuous learning experience, and I have learned many lessons from each of you here.

"You've taught me that middle school is not a time to be endured, but it is a time in which you discover the person that you are and are meant to be. Life is always a series of unfolding, but the middle school years are a time in which you begin to discover and define yourself.

"I believe that you have all learned how to identify your own values and priorities in a supportive community."

Eight eighth-graders received awards for achievements in physical education as well as robotics. The Daughters of the American Revolution presented their annual Youth

Citizenship Award to eighth-grade student Audrey Goeltz.

Grade Point Average Awards were given to students who had been enrolled in Towns County Middle School for three consecutive years while maintaining a 90 or higher GPA.

"We know that academic success requires dedication, hard work and a desire to succeed," said TCMS language arts teacher Julie Thompson.

Out of the 71 graduates, an outstanding 37 of them received this GPA award. Other awards presented to the students that day included PTSO Citizenship Awards and individual certificates for extracurricular activities and Advanced Placement classes.

2016 was the first year eighth-grade students were given the opportunity to take ninth-grade classes to receive high school credit for their studies.

The eighth-grade chorus ensemble performed one

last song together as middle school students, "Best Day of My Life" by American Authors, and the entire eighth-grade chorus joined together to sing the hit song "Some Nights" by Fun.

Before the ceremony ended, students presented two departing eighth-grade teachers, Libby Dayton and Julie Thompson, with flowers and a standing ovation, a true show of character from such a compassionate and driven group of students.

"You have tremendous teachers and you have had them the entire journey through middle school," said Principal Chastain. "You are well prepared to enter high school with no hesitation. "You have learned many important life lessons and you have recognized their significance. You now understand that each individual is not as strong as the whole group, for you yourself are no longer hesitant beginners."

Reward...from Page 1A

the ceremony began. Councilmembers worked hard throughout the year on fund-raising events and even visited the capital, truly learning how to be great leaders within their school and community.

Special first-grade guests Samantha Blackwell, Emma Schuette and Lilly Martin sang for their peers at the ceremony, sharing an uplifting song called "Just Listen," reminding everyone to pay attention and really listen to what's going on around.

Mrs. Sandra Charbonneau presented PTSO (Parent-Teacher-Student Organization) Citizenship Awards to two deserving fifth-grade students, Makayla Stephens and Pablo Vargas.

TCES Assistant Principal Shannon Moss presented students of all grade levels with SOAR and MORE awards.

SOAR stands for Students Organized Advanced Reading, and that award is given to students who, according to their grade levels, received certain scores on tests over books read throughout the year.

The MORE Award, or Mathematics Organization Resulting in Excellence, is also given to students who received specific scores on tests over the course of the year, again based on grade level.

"It's an honor, a privilege and a blessing to work with the students each and every day, as well as the faculty and staff and just to be a part of this community," said Moss.

Two outstanding third-grade students, Matthew Ricca and Ansleigh Hardin, received bicycles donated by Jon Fullerton of Jacky Jones Chevrolet. Ricca and Hardin

read more books than anyone else in the school.

Other awards given out that morning included Honor Roll Awards, "AB" Average Awards, Chorus and DRUM Awards, Governor's Shape Youth Fitness Awards, Science Olympiad Awards, Perfect Attendance Awards, Reading Counts Awards and Citizenship Awards.

All in all, it was a fun-filled morning, with every student walking away with recognition for the hard work they had put forth throughout the year, and everyone excited for the wonderful summer days to come.

"This summer, if you're bored, go outside," said Sue Sutton, a third-grade teacher. "And don't just listen - open those eyeballs and wonder. As long as you wonder, you will always learn and you will always grow. We are so proud of the growth you have made."

Grads...from Page 1A

Byers. "What a great place to be in life. What a great time to celebrate your many accomplishments."

"We are so glad you came here to have this celebration service. This administration and this faculty and your family have worked very hard to get you to this point."

Senior Austin Watson followed Byers with a performance of "In Christ Alone," playing guitar and leading his fellow classmates in song.

Ken Edwards' Baccalaureate Address, entitled Reality vs. Our Plan, was an illustrated sermon using four tote boxes, a small and large tote denoted God, and a small and large tote denoted "myself," showing the students how God can fit into the rest of their lives as they proceed into the world.

"Right now is the time when it's going to seem like the universe revolves around you," said Edwards. "It's going to seem like this time in your life is all about you, all about your decisions and your life and your choices and your goals and where you're going."

"It could be very easy to think about, 'Well, there's this God that created you and who loves you unconditionally, and who was here from the beginning of time, and he's provided you a way to have a relationship with him but you're going to fit him



Towns County Schools Resource Officer Donnie Jarrard gives TCES seniors gold nuggets that they can use in life. Photo/Lily Avery

into a little piece of your deal, because this is really all about you."

"But, the real thing to do is to figure out how you can fit into your Heavenly Father's plan."

Prior to the Benediction, given by Rev. Donnie Jarrard, seniors Michelle Miller, Daulton Rogers, LeAnn Dean, Jocelyn Byers and Rachael Barnard provided a moving performance of the contemporary Christian hit, "How He Loves Us."

Before Jarrard gave a final word of prayer for the evening, he summed up the Class of 2016 perfectly, giving ex-

amples of individual seniors who had not only touched his life, but taught him more than he ever thought possible.

"I'm honored to stand and speak for such a great group of people," said Jarrard. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to get to know each and every one of you. You're such an incredible group of people."

"It's incredible to see the love and compassion that each one of you has for one another. This class has been through so much, and they really came together and were there for each other, and that's truly awesome."

Firefighters...from Page 1A

Training Division Chief, kicked off the ceremony with background information on the many drills, assessments and tests the recruits must undergo before reaching graduation.

Recruits learned how to quick dress into their uniforms in under two minutes, utilize and exchange air cylinders, gain forcible entry to burning structures, how to control and extinguish structural fires, and many other valuable skills required to best serve the county.

Before they could graduate, recruits had to pass several state evaluations, which included both written and physical examinations.

Since January, these men and women have dedicated several nights each week and many of their weekends to reaching their current level of certification.

"I think this is a good group, I appreciate each and every one of them," said Training Chief Mills, before returning to his graduates. "This is just now starting your journey,

Stay on track, be dedicated, work for the people of Towns County and work for yourself. That's all I ask."

This particular group of rookie firefighters is the first to graduate in several years, and the first since Chief Copeland became fire chief a year and a half ago.

"This graduation means a great deal to me - it's the future of the fire department," said Chief Copeland. "These guys have already begun the journey of keeping up a tremendous amount of training, but the process of getting them here really does mean everything, not only to this department but also to this community."

"They have a lot of rules and regulations they have to go by, but in the end, it's so important for the safety of our department and the safety of the citizens of our county. They're so important. It's like a basketball team - they come in as freshmen, they grow up to be seniors, and then, when they have a lot of experience under their belts, they're able

to get out there and save lives and property."

The recruits recited the Oath of Office alongside Chief Copeland and Training Chief Mills, after which each recruit received a hard-earned name plaque along with his or her station assignment and helmet.

The nine recruits are as follows: Trevor Kittle, Station 1; Colleen McKee, Station 2; Robert Turner, Station 3; Terry Oliver, Station 6; Josh Milam, Station 1; Robert Lowrie, Station 5; Tori Caldwell, Station 2; Mason Schuknecht, Station 1; and Patrick Carroll, Station 2.

Chief Copeland, Training Chief Mills and the rest of the Towns County Fire and Rescue department hope to make new recruit graduations a yearly occurrence.

"These guys and girls have worked really hard," said Chief Copeland. "I look forward to watching many more graduates go through this same process in the coming years."

Checker...from Page 1A

in the crafts area of the fairgrounds.

"This is our third year to have the Wine Festival, and we changed the name of it just a little bit," said Thomason, noting that it used to be called the Appalachian Wine & Jazz Festival. "We've got different kinds of music this time - there will be four or five different groups performing that Saturday, and it's from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m."

More than a dozen wineries will be featured at the festival, with a wide variety of wines from which to choose, including selections from local favorites Hightower Creek Vineyards and Crane Creek.

Fine wines will be highlighted in this year's festival, and tickets for the event are \$35, which gets festivalgoers several tastes from each wine vendor.

Handmade crafts will also be available during the festival, as well as food that complements the various wines.

"A couple of the wineries here in Towns County are having wine dinners," said Thomason, putting Hightower Creek and Crane Creek on that list. "You can just stroll through, and there will be restaurants - I've got the Blue Otter and the Chophouse, and the Epic Catering and Brother's (at Willow Ranch) are



Checker asks this gentleman from the crowd to come on stage and do the Twist in front of 2,500-plus people. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

the four restaurants that have confirmed to be here for it."

The fairgrounds has always been a place of great diversity in the realm of activities - hosting motorcycle conferences, Green Egg conventions, concerts, cornhole tournaments, just to name a few - and the wine festival is a perfect example of how Thomason strives to go above and beyond to provide entertainment for area residents.

"We're trying to add

lots of variety, having different events and different types of music," said Thomason. "Something for everybody to enjoy. And the wine festival is something we're trying to really get off the ground. This is our third year, and we're trying to really promote it as fine wines. North Georgia wineries are popping up everywhere in the area, and there are some great wineries here. So we want to promote that, because it's a huge draw."

Board certifies election results

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Board of Elections and Registration certified the May 24 election results in a special called meeting on Friday, May 27.

Just prior to certification, the board approved 11 of 13 provisional ballots in the May 24 Primaries.

Two of the ballots were rejected, one because the voter was a known felon. The other was rejected because the person was not a registered voter in Towns County.

Final election results must be in the Secretary of State's office by Tuesday, May 31, and have been posted outside the Old Rock Jail.

The provisional made no difference in any race.



Registrar Tonya Nichols discusses provisional ballots last week during a called meeting to certify Towns County's May 24 Primaries.

elections scheduled for July 26 at Towns County's regular polling locations: State House District 8, Matt Gurtler and Kent Woerner for State Rep-

resentative. Board of Education Post 5 - Kilee Smith versus Nathan Noblet in that election race. See page 5B for results.

