

# Minor a major part of school

By STACY GREEN  
scoutingground@cherokeescout.com

**Hwassee Dam** – A handyman is just what Hwassee Dam School needed to revitalize the campus and uplift the student body.

Five years ago, a need for a handyman around the school came up, and just the right person came to fill it.

Volunteering 375 hours per year to the school and being the most popular man on campus, Steve Minor is Hwassee Dam School's Volunteer of the Year.

Minor is a retired school principal who moved to Murphy in 2004 with his wife, who is the secretary at Hwassee Dam School.

Minor noticed that the school needed some weeding and mowing, so he volunteered his free time to help out.

Seeing the need for the school, Minor began to work more and more with the school, eventually becoming the handyman.

"Keeping everything nice and inviting is part of education and help the students," Minor said. "It helps parents get a good feel for what the school is like inside."

Walking down the halls of Hwassee Dam School, Minor knows the name of all 188 students, and they know him, too.

Students say "hello" to him in passing and talk about how "cool" it is to have Mr. Minor substitute in their class.

Along with handy work, Minor also substitutes, proctors tests and drives the softball bus to away games.

Minor said he volunteers because he enjoys being around the kids and knows that a good role model is just what they need.

"It's good for the kids to see volunteering is good and that they want to keep their school

clean and neat," Minor said. Minor also is a volunteer in the Big Brothers Big Sisters school program. Minor is a big brother to a fifth-grader and said his little brother is important to him.

"I help him with tutoring, and we get to do a lot of things together," Minor said. "I enjoy being a big brother and being a role model."

Minor also was the youth pastor at Ranger Baptist Church, and many of the students who attend Hwassee Dam Schools were part of his church.

"I know a lot of the kids from church and from substituting, I like to know everyone's name," Minor said. "It is my pleasure to help the school and be a role model."

Hwassee Dam High Principal Tom Graham said Minor is a blessing to the school.

"We truly appreciate how he helps our school, and we appreciate all the work he does here," Graham said. "He does everything because he wants to do it and everyone gets to benefit."

Graham said that two words to describe the school's volunteer of the year would be energetic and caring.

"I couldn't picture the school without him being a part of it," Graham said. "He is a blessing to the school."

Minor was honored at the Fifth Annual Appreciation Banquet held Thursday, April 25 at Tri-County Community College.

**Cherokee County Schools Superintendent Dr. Stephen Lane** thanked the 245 volunteers and business partners at the banquet.

During the 2012-2013 Cherokee County Schools documented an accumulated 19,419 donated hours from 409 volunteers according to Chief Information Officer Chien Hardin.



SCOTT WALLACE/swallac@cherokeescout.com  
Steve Minor, who was awarded Volunteer of the Year at Hwassee Dam School, does what he loves to do; help keep the grounds of the school beautiful.

## Murphy: Working toward this moment for 13 years

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of David and Nancy Thompson, said this ceremony marked the end of a journey that started in kindergarten.

"Whether you realize it or not, we have been working toward this moment for 13 years. Remember when homework was as simple as coloring inside the lines. Remember the first time a teacher treated you like an adult?"

Thompson, who will be attending Western Carolina University to major in chemistry with a goal of going to medical school, urged her fellow graduates to thank those who guided them. "Remember those who helped

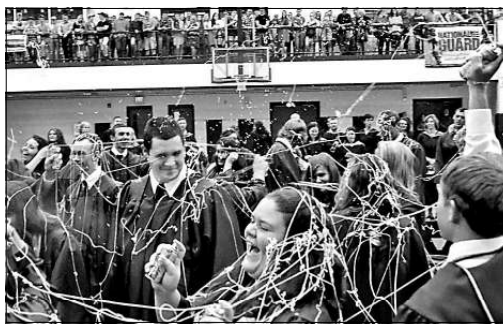
you succeed." Shields praised the class of 2013 and urged family, staff and spectators to join him in applauding the graduates.

"You've raised the bar for those who are going to follow you," he said.

As he was about to pronounce them graduates, Superintendent Stephen Lane told them, "It's been an honor as superintendent to watch you grow from middle school until today."

Thompson said to her classmates, "Every moment is fleeting. Don't forget to enjoy the present."

Congratulations Class of 2013," Cambrian said. "God bless."



Photos by SCOTT WALLACE/swallac@cherokeescout.com

It's Silly String pandemonium following the turning of the tassels Saturday morning at Hwassee Dam High School's graduation ceremonies. The change in scheduling and a break in the weather saw the most comfortable temperatures at graduation in the school's history.



Seniors Stephanie Roman and Rebekah Pullium play the first of two musical interludes they performed during graduation Saturday for Tri-County Early College High School students. This year's early college seniors, only 22 in number, earned more than \$1.2 million in scholarships.

## Mountain Youth graduates show strength of character

By JOSEPH MARTIN  
jmartin@cherokeescout.com

**Murphy** – Jonathan Scott Anderson, who was among 33 seniors from Mountain Youth School to receive a diploma Thursday night, said there were times when the teachers made him mad, but he realizes they were trying to help him.

"We want to thank everyone who got us here today," he said in a speech to his fellow graduates and audience.

Bill Gaither, Mountain Youth principal, said Anderson had left the school and came back. "We're real proud of you," he told him.

Mountain Youth is an alternative school with a lower student-teacher ratio, which provides more opportunities for one-on-one attention. Some of the students attending the school have had academic issues. Some of them have had behavioral issues.

Dr. Lane said the school is able to give the students the attention they need to overcome those issues.

"Children that have not been successful in a traditional environment, have been successful

at Mountain Youth," Lane said. Students there also can go on a fast track toward a career.

Anderson was one of two speakers. Gaither said, "They did a real good job this year."

Megan Hicks was the other speaker to address her fellow graduates.

"I hope all of you will be successful in whatever you choose to do. Now it is time to go our separate ways," she said.

The keynote speaker was Mayor Bill Hughes. "This is the first and most important accomplishment of your life," he said. "This diploma puts you at the head of the line. You've had obstacles. I realize that. Still you were determined to make it."

Hughes reminded the graduates that they are adults now. That means they've got to be thinking about their future.

"Some of you may want to continue your education, and I hope you do," he said.

Hughes urged the graduates to not let the obstacles discourage them. "Many times, obstacles are there to test your sincerity," he said. "If you get discouraged, pick yourself up and keep going."



JOSEPH MARTIN/jmartin@cherokeescout.com

Samuel Kendrick picks up his high school diploma at Mountain Youth School's commencement ceremony Thursday. He was one of 33 graduates participated in the event at Murphy First United Methodist Church.

SCOTT WALLACE/swallac@cherokeescout.com

**Graduate Emma Leatherwood** raises her fist in victory Friday evening as she and her former classmates, now fellow graduates, file out of the newly re-named Bob Hendrix Stadium at Murphy High School immediately following commencement exercises.



## Early college grads happy to be dysfunctional family

By JOSEPH MARTIN  
jmartin@cherokeescout.com

**Peachtree** – If there's one word that the top two graduates for Tri-County Early College High School have used to describe their class, it's family.

"A dysfunctional family," said Valectorian Clay Collins, "But a family."

Students at the early college get a major advantage when they pursue higher education. They can be holding associate's degrees when they hit the campuses of a four-year college of their choice.

The county-run school has a student-teacher ratio of 20-1. It routinely produces top college preparedness and entry exam scores.

The running for valedictorian and salutatorian was neck and neck. Both Collins and Salutatorian Breanna Cheek had the same grade point average. They both had the same number of credits toward graduation. The decision was made based upon the two students' American College Testing scores.

Collins, the son of Mike and Donna Collins, will be studying economics at Berry College in

Mount Berry, Ga. In his address to his fellow graduates, he spoke about family at home and school.

"We supported each other. We became a family," Collins said. "We have seen our own transition. We've made great friends, some that will last well beyond tonight."

Collins spoke of some of the trials the class endured. They went through lightning strikes, tornadoes, floods and a law-enforcement lock down [in response an armed robbery of a nearby drugstore]. Some of that even occurred in the same week.

Collins, who seeks to work in the U.S. State Department, said, "We are, and still will be, a family. Now we face the inevitable. We are leaving. Thank you guys."

Suzanne DesLauriers, one of the school's founding faculty, was keynote speaker. She offered her views of where she sees the graduates in the future.

"I know these students very well, and they're going to be a success," she said.

Cheek, daughter of Derek and Alissa Cheek gave an emotional speech as she referred to graduating

as bittersweet. "It's crazy to believe in just a few short minutes, we'll be high school graduates," Cheek will be pursuing a doctor of pharmacy at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Cheek, thanked her mother, who is also early college principal, and said to her fellow graduates, "You all mean so much to me."

She urged classmates, "Remember where you came from. Remember to give back to your community. Remember the golden rule. We are remembered by the way we treated others more than anything else."

# Eagles: Keep your dreams

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Salutatorian Taylor Swain said, "After all these long years, we finally made it to the caps, gowns and tassels."

She urged fellow graduates to have new dreams and don't let them get away. If you don't have a dream, go out and find a new one.

"See what the world has in store for you," she said. "Don't settle for what others expect of you. I consider all of you my family. Even when we leave our school, I encourage you not to forget this place. Don't forget that special feeling of being a graduate of Hwassee Dam."

Principal Tom Graham said seniors this year scored 94 percent on the career readiness exam. That's the highest he has ever seen at Hwassee Dam. The school was named one of the best high schools in the nation for the fourth time by U.S. News and World Report. Seniors of the class of 2013 earned \$619,420 in combined scholarship funds.

Just before graduation ceremonies, Isaac Hayes, said it is a bittersweet time.

"I look forward to college but I am sad to leave here," he said.

Hayes will attend Western Carolina University, then later transfer to North Carolina or Duke University for environmental engineering.

Graduate Kayla Farmer said, "It is just now hitting home. I have been here for all four of my high school years. I am ready to go to college. But I will miss everyone."

Farmer is going to Appalachian State University.

"It feels great," Wayne Jones said about graduation. "I will miss the people. I look forward to going into the Marines. I am leaving July 13."

Vocational honor student Joseph Crow led in prayer followed by music by the Hwassee Dam School Chorus. Senior class President Chelsey Lovingood led turning of tassels after awarding of degrees by Superintendent of Schools Stephen Lane.

The Alma Mater was led by Mr. and Miss Hwassee Dam - Swain and Hayes.

Among the audience was Shirley Morgan, who graduated in 1957, the first graduating class at the present school facility. There were only 13 graduates, she said.

"I come to a lot of graduations," Morgan said.

Diane Morrow Curtis was present to see her cousin Kayla Ledford graduate. Her granddaughter graduated four years ago.

"I am sad but happy too," David Lovingood said of his granddaughter Chelsey Lovingood's graduation. "To me, she is still a little girl. But she has grown into a fine, young woman. I hope the Lord will keep her safe. I want the best for her. She will face things that will be discouraging but if she makes the right decisions, she will be happy."

Jordan Johnson was present to see his younger brother, Jake Johnson graduate.

"Time has flown by. It seems like I got out of high school yesterday," the 2008 graduate said. "I remember when it used to be so hot in here [for graduation]. It feels great."