

78 Graduates Honored as The Gatton Academy's Class of 2021

On Sunday afternoon, May 2, graduates representing 42 counties, including Estill, from across the Commonwealth of Kentucky were recognized during The Gatton Academy's 14th graduation ceremony.

The ceremony took place in Western Kentucky University's Diddle Arena, where masks were required and attending graduates and families were strategically spaced to adhere to COVID distancing guidelines. The graduation ceremony was simultaneously webcast to facilitate viewing by extended family and friends, alumni, and WKU faculty and staff.

Gatton Academy Executive Director and Mahurin Professor of Gifted Education Dr. Julia Roberts expressed that the ceremony was a celebration for the entire state and commended students on their accomplishments. Eighteen members of

the class were selected as National Merit Finalists. 80% of graduates participated in faculty-sponsored research during their Gatton Academy experience.

Additionally, 25 graduates completed the STEM + Critical Languages sequences in either Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, or Russian.

Among the graduates are three students who advanced to the Regeneration International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). In addition, one student was named Regeneration Science and Talent Search Finalist, The Gatton Academy's first student to be awarded that accolade.

Graduates won U.S. Department of State National Security Language Initiative for Youth scholarships, were named U.S. Presidential Scholar candidates, and one became a finalist for the Breakthrough Challenge.

The graduating class

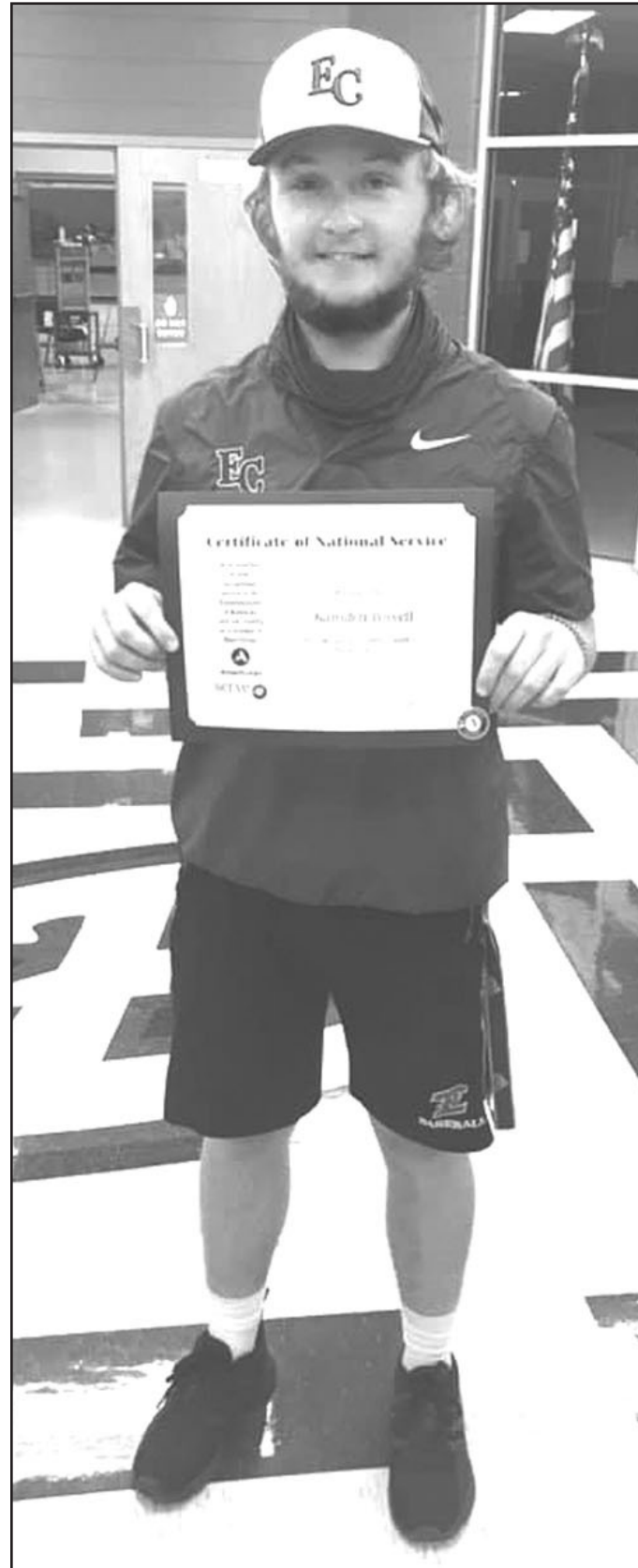
voted to select three of their peers to speak at the ceremony. Starr May, a graduate from Versailles, Christine Belance, a graduate from Louisville, and Andrew Davison, a graduate from Morehead, were selected.

Dr. Jason Glass, Commissioner of Education (KDE), congratulated the students on their achievements. "Graduating from this [program] is a signal that you are among an elite group of your peers, mastering the role of student and learner. And while we celebrate and honor your academic accomplishments, a significant challenge ahead will be for you to commit to an unending search for knowledge - an unending journey of learning," he said.

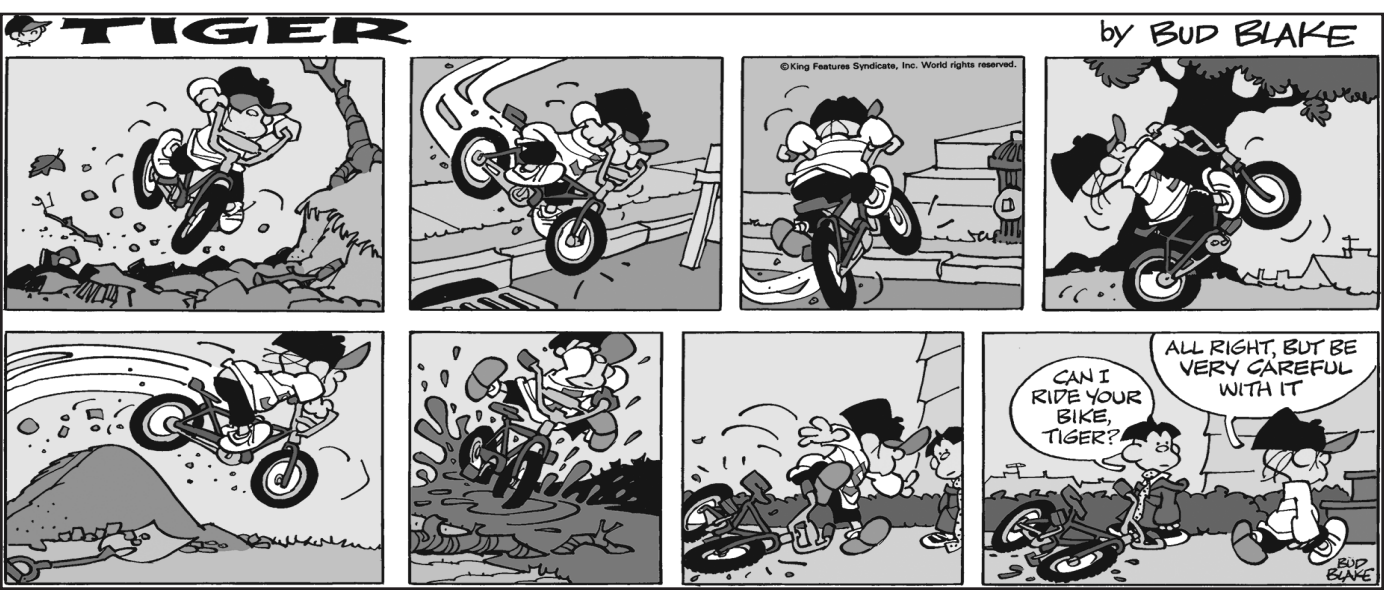
Morgan Samples (Estill County High School) was one of the 78 Gatton graduates.

She was also a Gatton Community Scholar recipient for completing two semesters of research with a research outcome that was presented to a professional audience after being accepted through a vetted process OR for completing four semesters of study in STEM + Critical Language pathway, AND documenting 60 hours of service.

About The Gatton Academy: Established in 2007, The Gatton Academy is Kentucky's first two-year residential STEM program for gifted and talented junior and seniors. The Gatton Academy's students enroll as juniors and are full-time WKU students while pursuing their interests in advanced science, technology, engineering, and mathematical careers. The Gatton Academy has been named to The Washington Post's list of top-performing schools with elite students for nine consecutive years.



Kamden Powell served as a FRYSC Americorps youth service member with Estill Springs Elementary Family Resource Center this school year. Americorps is a national service program that engages people of all ages to improve lives and foster civic engagement as they address critical community needs. Americorps members have a heart for service and a calling to be a leader. They pledge to help make our people safer, smarter, and healthier; to bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Kamden served 300 hours at Estill Springs Elementary helping to address some of the needs of our families and students in the realms of food insecurities and mental health and wellness. Kamden will receive a Segal Education Award for \$1,310 to apply towards the cost of education at the school of his choice. Kamden was presented this recognition certificate from the state of Kentucky and a service pin. We are honored that he chose to serve with FRYSC Americorps to provide service to our school and would like to again say THANK YOU for your service!



Blue Grass Plant Destroys 25% of Chemical Agent Stockpile

On April 25, the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) team reached a significant milestone in the destruction of 25% of the original 523 U.S. tons of chemical agent stored at the Blue Grass Army Depot (BGAD).

The current destruction campaigns, mustard-agent 155mm projectiles in the Explosive Destruction Technology facility and VX 155mm projectiles in the main plant, and the previous completion of the GB 8-inch projectiles in the main plant, all contributed to the destruction milestone, Coyle said. The workers have been following firm COVID-19 protocols since March 2020.

BGCAPP partners with BGAD and the Blue Grass Chemical Activity (BGCA) to accomplish the chemical weapons destruction mission.

"For decades now, BGCA has stored chemical weapons safely, securely and compliantly," said Lt. Col. Ed Williams, BGCA commander. "The Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant's destruction of 25% of BGCA's original stockpile is not only encouraging, but it also fulfills our promise to our community."

As of April 25, more than 130 tons of chemical agent have been destroyed. Destruction operations began in June 2019. Once the VX 155mm projectile campaign is complete, the plant will undergo a changeover process to begin destroying VX M55 rockets. The last campaign will be the destruction of GB M55 rockets. All chemical weapons are to be destroyed by the end of 2023, under a congressionally mandated deadline.



Congratulations Class of 2021!



The Estill County Tribune will be printing a special section with photos of the 2021 ECHS and home-school graduates on Wednesday, May 26. Please submit color photos of graduates to news@estilltribune.com for the best print format by May 19. Thank you!

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