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A humbled Butler told the crowd that he didn't know which one was more nervous, Aponte or himself.

"Being at Woody Gap, you're not used to crowds like this," he said, pun intended.

Butler said Aponte was the reason he was standing before the crowd.

"As a coach, we use words like character, work ethic and focus," he said. "When I asked Haley's teachers to share a few words about her, they said she was a hard worker, a lot of fun to have in class and that she expects a lot from herself.

"They added that she's very studious, very positive, and she has a super attitude," Butler said. "She works well with others, tutors others and has a solid work ethic.

"Others said that Haley is a gem, has a tremendous personality and is always ready to go to work," he said.

Aponte adjusted to life at Woody Gap School, and she excelled in her classwork. Physics, math and other sciences became a breeze to her.



Woody Gap School Principal Jinjer Taylor, STAR Student Haley Aponte and STAR Teacher Gary Butler. Photo/Charles Duncan

She's a bookworm, she loves homework and she loves the classroom.

Most of all, she loves the Lord Jesus Christ, Butler said.

"Four years ago, I had an opportunity to meet her in homeroom," Butler said. "She always came in with a big smile on her face, very upbeat and very positive.

"It's one of those things

where you know that students like Haley stand out," he said.

"At the time, I never knew that God sends us stars as a blessing," he said. "It would be very difficult to talk about Haley without talking about the great decision she has made in life.

"That big decision is not where she wants to go to college, or what she wants to do in life or who she

wants as a husband," he said. "It's her relationship with the one True King, Jesus Christ.

"It's strange, some people work so hard to keep Him out of schools, and God keeps sending stars back into the schools," Butler said. "Haley's not perfect, even stars shoot across the sky, but she's a great example for others.

"In 2005, God sent Woody Gap a star," he said. "She's a blessing and today, she's our STAR Student."



Union County STAR Teacher Brett Chatham saluted Haley Aponte for her STAR Teacher selection. Photo/Charles Duncan

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more," Romano said. "He's made a huge impact on my life and my achievements. I really appreciate what he's done for me."

Chatham spoke proudly of the Region Champion Mock Trial Team.

"Nic was a big part of that," he said. "I've taught a lot of intelligent young students at Union County High School. I'm very proud to have graduated from the school and I'm honored to be a teacher there.

"I have taught a lot of exceptional students," he said. "Nic is very intelligent, he's a very impressive young man. But the thing that always impressed me about Nic is his maturity.

"Before he ever took a test, or filled out a work sheet or argued with me in class, I could tell just by the way he carried himself, that he's got it together," Chatham said.

"He's a very mature young man; he comes prepared," Chatham said. "It's very easy to meet Nic halfway.

"If we all had students like Nic everyday, we all wouldn't be talking about re-



U.S. Rep. Doug Collins with Nic Romano, Brett Chatham, Haley Aponte and Gary Butler during the Chamber of Commerce's annual salute to STAR students and STAR teachers. Photo/Charles Duncan

tirement everyday," Chatham said. "He's been accepted by some very fine schools, he told me today that he's leaning toward Stanford. I'm very proud to say that he is a graduate of Union County High School."

Chatham also applauded Woody Gap School's STAR Student, Haley Elise Aponte,

for her selection of Gary Butler as her STAR Teacher.

"I'm a graduate of Union County High School, and when I graduated from college, I came back here as a football coach," Chatham said. "I had no clue what I was doing and for the next few years, I still didn't know what I was doing.

"Coach Butler took me under his wing, and showed me how to coach," Chatham said. "He just really made me feel welcome.

"Coach Butler, I just want to tell you, if I had had the opportunity, I would have chosen you as my STAR Teacher," Chatham said.