

# GOLDEN EAGLE AWARDS



GUIDEBOOK  
2026

Dear Golden Eagle Coordinator,

Welcome to the 2026 Golden Eagle Awards. We look forward to working again with educators and students across Central Georgia on this program, now in its 49<sup>th</sup> year. The Golden Eagle Awards program celebrates exceptional high school seniors for academic excellence, exemplary service, and outstanding leadership — students whose volunteerism has impacted their school and community in profound and enduring ways.

The Golden Eagle has been the symbol of *The Telegraph* since 1856 when the brother-in-law of then publisher, Joseph Clisby, gifted him with a grand 4-foot cast pewter statue with a 92-inch wingspan weighing 691 pounds. The legendary statue has anchored *Telegraph* offices in Macon throughout the decades.

The Golden Eagle Awards return for the 49<sup>th</sup> annual year in Central Georgia, the sixth year under United Way of Central Georgia's (UWCG) wing. United Way of Central Georgia took the reins of the longstanding scholarship program after *The Telegraph* announced in 2020 it would no longer be able to continue the tradition.

Since 1977, the awards have celebrated outstanding high school seniors in 14 categories including: Art, Athletics, Chris Allers' Citizenship Award, Drama, English Literature, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE), Journalism, Marketing, and Communication, Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Math, Music, Science, Social Science, Technology, and World Languages. Those seniors were nominated by their schools and then judged by local experts in their category of nomination. The winner in each category receives recognition at an annual award ceremony, a Golden Eagle trophy, and a \$2,000 scholarship. Historically, another 14 runners-up are selected, who each receive a certificate and \$1,000 scholarship.

We appreciate your school's participation and are grateful for your time and effort as you quickly choose your nominees and navigate the process with them. Participation is open to all public and private school students in UWCG's 19 county coverage area, as well those home-schooled.

**Please read this guide carefully, paying special attention to the Golden Eagle calendar. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com) .**

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A Golden Eagle Award is one of the most prestigious prizes for a graduating high school senior in Central Georgia. Now in its 49<sup>th</sup> year, the program celebrates service, scholarship, and leadership. There is a proud legacy of Golden Eagle Award winners who have used their time and talent to make significant and lasting contributions to their respective schools and communities. The nomination process culminates with the **Golden Eagle Award Ceremony** at the **Grand Opera House** where the winners and runners-up are announced.

## Information for 2026

1. Nomination form:
  - a. Nominees WILL attach their formal senior yearbook photo to their nomination form.
  - b. Nominees WILL NOT include their social security number.
2. **The nomination process begins on Thursday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> and ends on Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>.**
3. **You must interview via Microsoft Teams on Saturday, March 21, 2026, or Saturday, March 28, 2026.** The interview is mandatory. **The date will be assigned to you based on your category and you may not choose your date.**
4. Missing the interview disqualifies you from placing, but you will still be recognized as a Golden Eagle nominee, be invited to attend the ceremony, and receive a Golden Eagle graduation cord.
5. Interview Dates are assigned as follows. Note: you must interview on your assigned date based on the category in which you have been nominated.

### **Saturday, March 21, 2026**

Art  
Athletics  
CTAE  
Chris Allers' Citizenship Award  
Drama  
English Lit  
Journalism/Marketing/Communications

### **Saturday, March 28, 2026**

JROTC  
Math  
Music  
Science  
Social Science  
Technology  
World Languages

## TIPS & INFORMATION FOR GOLDEN EAGLE COORDINATORS

1. Typically, at the beginning of each school year high school principals and counselors in the United Way of Central Georgia's fifteen county footprint (service area) are contacted to provide the name and email of their school's designated Golden Eagle Awards coordinator.
2. **\*\* ASAP, please submit the full name, title, email address and cell phone number of your school's 2026 Golden Eagle coordinator.**
3. **Once the nomination period opens on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the coordinator should check email regularly for Golden Eagle information and updates.**
4. **All Golden Eagle communication is handled through the schools' Golden Eagle coordinator. If a nominee or parent has a question, challenge, or a concern, please instruct them to contact you and you will contact United Way of Central Georgia. We are available to help and offer guidance when needed: JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com) .**

5. Please impress upon your nominees the importance of:
  - a. **Meeting the submission deadline. On Sunday, March 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59 p.m., the nomination process automatically locks and closes.**
  - b. **\*\*No additional nomination forms will be accepted after that time. No exceptions.**
  - c. **Being present for an interview is mandatory.**
6. You will receive the interview schedule and further instructions after the nomination period ends and the interview schedules are created.
7. **Encourage your nominees to notify you ASAP of a known schedule conflict on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup>.** In the event of a conflict, please contact JoLee Henson Carlson as soon as possible so we can make an accommodation if possible. **Once the schedule is created, we will try to accommodate a change, but can't guarantee it.**
8. **Your school or nominees' families may be interested in purchasing an ad in the Golden Eagles special section, which publishes in print and online. (More information on the preparation and purchase of ads is forthcoming.)**

## **ELIGIBILITY & QUALIFICATIONS**

1. The Golden Eagle competition is open to all graduating 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (seniors) in public school, private school, or who are home-schooled in United Way of Central Georgia's 19 county service area.
2. Service, scholarship, and leadership are essential and foundational qualifications for a Golden Eagle nominee.
3. **Ultimately, the winner in each category is the individual who best uses his or her talent, ability, and achievements in relation to the category to serve and impact their high school and community.**
4. When selecting a Golden Eagle winner and runner-up, the judges are instructed to consider service, achievements, leadership, character, and interview skills, plus any other attributes they deem important. Each panel of judges in the 14 categories is given autonomy to choose their winner and runner-up. **The judges' decisions are final.**

## **NOMINATION GUIDELINES**

1. A student can be nominated in one category only.
2. Each high school can nominate only one student in each category. If you have two students equally worthy of a nomination in a single category, choose only one student.
3. It is not necessary to nominate a student in every category. **Please confine your nominations to students truly worthy of consideration.**
4. No one-year exchange student may be nominated in any category.
5. While it is not mandatory that all services be directly related to a nominee's category, some service must relate to the category in which he/she is nominated. Nominees should include their achievements and honors earned and their school/community service performed during their full high school career, grades 9 - 12.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES TO DETERMINE A STUDENT'S QUALIFICATIONS

Service, achievement, leadership, and character should form the basis of a nomination.

- a. **Service:** The core qualifications for a Golden Eagle nominee are: a record of volunteerism in the school and community, an unselfish and continuous use of time, and talent to help others. Creation of, or the improvement or enhancement of a program, project, initiative, or organization is evidence of service.
- b. **Achievement:** Accomplishments, honors, and recognition represent evidence of achievement, both in school and in the community. Purpose, as applied to the student's category, persistence, and the realization of goals are of utmost importance.
- c. **Leadership:** The hallmark of a good leader is taking initiative in constructive and beneficial programs and projects, tenacity in the face of challenges, and a tireless effort to fulfill responsibilities and achieve goals. Independent thinking and creative problem solving are evidence of quality leadership. Elected positions demonstrate leadership and esteem. How a nominee uses opportunities is a prime factor of consideration.
- d. **Character:** The character of an individual can be judged by observing personal habits and attitudes. An appreciation of our society's moral and spiritual values and good judgment as reflected in relationships with others is important. A nominee's ability to overcome physical, economic, or environmental challenges is an additional sign of character.

## NOMINATION FORM

1. It is suggested that school coordinators review the nomination form with the nominees before they begin working on it. An incomplete form will not be considered for the Golden Eagle Award, nor for runner-up. Please make sure your student receives a conformation email after submission.
2. Nominees are instructed to complete the nomination form in its entirety in one sitting. The program doesn't allow saving the document.
3. **A nomination form is incomplete without a teacher recommendation letter, which must be submitted on school letterhead. For home school students, the recommendation letter must be submitted on the association's letterhead.**
4. Often, school coordinators choose to give nominees a deadline to complete their nomination form, allowing time for you to review it and provide feedback before they submit it.
5. Like past nomination forms, this year's form requires specific information, and a fewer number of top achievements is more meaningful than a long list of less important ones. Please encourage your nominees to include only their best service and achievements. The emphasis is quality, not quantity.
6. Please impress upon the students the importance of:
  - a. Submitting a nomination form that is accurate and truthful. Any form containing false information will automatically be disqualified.
  - b. Dressing appropriately for their interview. Business attire is strongly recommended.
  - c. Being prepared for the interview.

- d. A performance in the Music, Drama and World Languages categories.
  - e. Work samples in the following categories: Art, Journalism/Marketing/Communication and Technology. Problems/computations in Mathematics.
7. Encourage your students to print a copy of their nomination form before submitting it in case for some reason it is not received.
  8. As stated on the nomination form that each nominee signs, all information and materials become the property of United Way of Central Georgia and will not be returned. Information may be used for publication and/or promotional purposes.
  9. Upon completion of their nomination form, each student will receive a confirmation message, "Thank you for your submission. Good luck."

## INTERVIEW

1. When the submission period ends, the nomination forms in each category are sent to the respective panel of judges for review and the interview schedule is set for each category.

**2. Golden Eagle VIRTUAL judging is held TWO DAYS ONLY — Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> and Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> via Microsoft Teams. NO INTERVIEWS ARE SCHEDULED ON ANY OTHER DAY — NO EXCEPTIONS.** A nominee who is unable to interview on that day is ineligible to win a Golden Eagle award or receive a runner-up award. However, that student will still be recognized as a Golden Eagle nominee.

3. Please notify your nominees of their interview time in their category promptly when you receive your school's interview schedule. The list will be sent ASAP.

**4. Interviews are conducted in 20-minute intervals and are scheduled back-to-back.** Generally, interviews are conducted between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., depending on how many nominees are in each category.

**5. Interview times are assigned in alphabetical order.** However, it's understandable that the nominees lead busy lives and may have another known commitment on that day, or a situation may arise unexpectedly.

**6. We will accommodate requests for a time change that are made before we generate the interview schedules.** Once the interview schedules are set and sent to the school coordinators, we will try to accommodate requests for a time change but cannot guarantee another time slot will be available.

**7. A change in interview time may only be requested for specific types of conflicts, not for convenience.** Acceptable reasons for requesting a different interview time include participation in a sanctioned school event or activity such as a music, academic or athletic competition, or personally, participation in a life cycle event, like a wedding. **Conflicts necessitating rescheduling will be handled on a case-by-case basis and a change can only be requested by the school's Golden Eagle Coordinator.**

**8. Please tell your nominees to inform you of any known conflicts as soon as possible - or immediately if one arises. If a change is needed, please contact JoLee Henson Carlson [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com)**

## **2026 GOLDEN EAGLE CALENDAR**

- **Thursday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026** — Nomination form goes live at:
  - <https://www.unitedwaycg.org/golden-eagle-awards>
- **Sunday, March 1, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.** - Online submission ends
- **Saturday, March 21, 2026, and Saturday, March 28, 2026** — Golden Eagle Judging
- **Thursday, May 14, 2026** — Ceremony in Person at The Grand Opera House (Macon)

## **2026 Golden Eagle Categories & Requirements**

- 1. Art:** requires a portfolio
- 2. Athletics**
- 3. Chris Allers' Citizenship Award**
- 4. Drama:** requires a 3-minute performance
- 5. English Literature**
- 6. Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE)**
- 7. Journalism/Marketing/Communications:** requires a portfolio
- 8. Mathematics:** requires the computation of mathematics problems
- 9. Music:** requires a 3-minute performance
- 10. Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC)**
- 11. Social Science:** includes history, political science, economics and sociology.
- 12. Science**
- 13. Technology:** requires a sample of work such as a website, graphic design, or multimedia project, etc.
- 14. World Languages:** requires a 2-minute speech or presentation in a chosen language, followed by questions.

## CATEGORIES & CRITERIA

### ART

A nominee should demonstrate excellence using his or her creative ability in drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic design, architecture, or in any other medium in the visual arts. The nominee provides outstanding leadership or service in his or her school or community, or inspired, encouraged, or taught others through use of visual arts.

**\*\* A nominee in ART must have a portfolio with three (3) samples of artwork — print or digital, for review by the judges on Microsoft Teams interview. Please inform your nominee of this mandatory requirement in ART. Nominee may also submit artwork digital images to JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com) by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026.**

### ATHLETICS

A nominee should demonstrate excellence through outstanding performance in a physical activity, in an individual or team sport, as part of a school athletic program, or in a recreational setting. A nominee may provide service, coaching and/or leadership through team management, or make other contributions to the welfare of others through athletic activities, talent, and effort. A nominee in this category should have exhibited unselfish, enduring service, exceptional sportsmanship, and fair play.

### CHRIS ALLERS' CITIZENSHIP AWARD

A nominee should be cognizant of the challenges, issues, and concerns in his/her school and/or community. He or she may have demonstrated interest or passion by volunteering with a service organization, developing a special project, working to resolve a communal problem or challenge, or devoting time to activities that improve and enrich his/her school or community. A nominee in this category is regarded as a leader. May have held elected office and employed academic skills or worked creatively to accomplish goals and is considered a dependable person who embodies civic consciousness and possesses a spirit of goodwill.

### DRAMA

A nominee should demonstrate excellence through outstanding service as a performer, director, writer, choreographer, organizer, or crew/technical staff member in the theatrical arts. This includes acting, singing, dancing, video, or film. They might have designed or constructed sets, created original scripts, performed on stage, aided with school or community projects, or in some way, inspired fellow students and others, and used talent for the benefit of others.

**\*\* A nominee whose specialty is acting must perform for the judges for three (3) minutes. A set designer or technical staff member must bring renderings or samples of work. A nominee who has produced a video or film must present up to three (3) minutes of work to the judges on a computer or other device, which he/she must furnish. When possible, a live performance is preferable. Vocalists not involved in theatrical productions should be nominated in the MUSIC category. Please inform nominee of the mandatory performance or portfolio requirement in DRAMA. Nominee may also submit digital visual aids to JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com) by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026.**

### ENGLISH AND LITERATURE

A nominee may have provided outstanding service and leadership by initiating activities related to a greater appreciation and understanding of English and literature. They might have employed skills to benefit a segment of his/her school and/or community. This can include tutoring, fostering a love of reading and command of the English language, or encouraging individual expression through written or

electronic communication.

#### **CAREER, TECHNICAL, AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION (CTAE)**

A nominee may have provided outstanding service and leadership in agriculture, business, or vocational education. This effort may have involved, but is not limited to agriculture, business, computing, construction, healthcare, marketing, family, and consumer science, or trade & industrial education. Practical application, individually, or through career or service organizations that led or inspired others, is important.

#### **JOURNALISM/MARKETING/COMMUNICATIONS**

A nominee should demonstrate excellence through writing, editing, news writing or reporting, or layout/design for student publications, such as the school newspaper, yearbook, literary magazine, or other journalistic outlets. In the community, contributions can include print or electronic media projects that benefit religious or civic groups or community organizations. A nominee must have a record of accomplishment for the benefit of his/her school or community which may incorporate marketing and communications components.

**\*\* A nominee must present a portfolio with three (3) samples of work for review by the judges.**

**Nominee may also submit digital visual aids to JoLee Henson Carlson at [icarlson@unitedwavcg.com](mailto:icarlson@unitedwavcg.com) by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026.**

**Please inform nominees of this mandatory requirement in JOURNALISM/MARKETING/COMMUNICATIONS.**

#### **MATHEMATICS**

A nominee may demonstrate excellence by providing or contributing mathematical knowledge through individual or group research, or involvement in a project, program, or initiative. They also might have done this by encouraging and promoting interest in mathematics, tutoring, or using computer science to benefit the school or helped others in the community.

#### **MUSIC**

A nominee must perform for the judges, demonstrating musical excellence in instrumental or vocal music. They might have used talent, knowledge, and performance skill for the benefit of others, and may have encouraged participation in and appreciation for music in school, or in the community through a religious or civic organization. A nominee could have been the creative or inspiring force in a musical group or the originator or leader of a music-related project or program for the benefit of others.

**\*\* A nominee must perform for the judges for three (3) minutes - either vocal or instrumental music. A vocalist who requires accompaniment must provide it. An instrumentalist must furnish his/her own instrument. Please inform nominee of this mandatory requirement in MUSIC.**

#### **JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS**

Open to any active JROTC student. Nominees should be involved with community service, have leadership skills, and work well with a team. On the nomination form, they should choose achievements and tell why it is especially meaningful to them. In the interview, they should describe their academic and career goals and future aspirations. This scholarship is awarded based on *academic, athletic, and leadership merit*.

## **SCIENCE**

A nominee should have provided outstanding service through ingenuity, or by applying the principals of chemistry, physics, biology, earth science, physiology, electronics, or other scientific areas of study. Ecological and preservation efforts also are included in this category.

## **SOCIAL SCIENCE**

A nominee should demonstrate excellence through use of knowledge of American and/or world history, international relations, political science, economics, and/or sociology for the benefit of others. Service may include participation in student government or in local/state/federal government.

Those activities, programs, or initiatives may include political campaigns, fundraising, voter registration, and advocacy, or volunteerism through service, civic, or political organizations. Of prime importance is how a nominee utilizes skill, talent and time to benefit his/her school or community.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

A nominee should provide outstanding service in the field of computer science or technology, such as multimedia, robotics, computer repair, or database management. They might provide outstanding service in school or in the community using skill and knowledge of technology to address a problem, issue, or challenge. Web or graphic design and multimedia are included in this category.

**\*\* A nominee must provide a sample of work which may include, but is not limited to a website, graphic design or multimedia project. This may be submitted via email to JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com) by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026. Please inform nominee of this mandatory requirement in TECHNOLOGY.**

## **WORLD LANGUAGES**

A nominee has demonstrated excellence in the use of a second language and outstanding service as a writer, translator, or interpreter in a language other than English. Judges will consider the level of advanced study, but most importantly, how a nominee uses knowledge and skill to benefit others. A nominee could be a member of a language club or made unique contributions to the advancement of language study at school or in the community, promoting multicultural understanding or better relations between/among diverse groups.

**\*\* A nominee must be prepared to give a two (2) minute presentation or speech in his/her language of study for the judges followed by questions. Please inform nominee of this mandatory requirement in WORLD LANGUAGES.**

## **JUDGING**

**Golden Eagle judging will be held on Microsoft Teams — Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> and Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. No interviews are scheduled on any other day, no exceptions.**

1. An independent panel of judges is selected for each of the 14 categories. The judges select the Golden Eagle winner and runner-up in their category.
2. When the nomination period ends on Sunday, March 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59 pm, the submissions will be sorted by category and an interview schedule will be created for each of the 14 categories.
3. **The order of nominee interviews in each category is determined by alphabetical order.**
4. School coordinators will be notified of their nominees' interview times by email ASAP. Generally, interviews are conducted between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
5. The judges individually review the nomination forms in their category before collectively interviewing the nominees on March 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> and selecting the winner and runner-up.
6. **A nominee who is unable to interview with the judges on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> or March 28<sup>th</sup> is ineligible to win a Golden Eagle award or runner-up award. No exceptions. However, the student remains a Golden Eagle nominee.**
7. **When notifying your students of their Golden Eagle nomination, ask them to tell you immediately of a known conflict on the day of judging, and to let you know immediately, if one arises.** We will accommodate requests for a time change that are made before we generate the interview schedules. Once the interview schedules are set and sent to the school coordinators, we will try to accommodate requests for a time change, but cannot guarantee another time slot will be available.
8. **A change in an interview time may be requested for specific types of conflicts only, not for personal convenience.** Acceptable reasons include: participation in a sanctioned school event or activity such as a music, academic or athletic competition; or personally, participation in a life cycle event, like a wedding. **Conflicts and time rescheduling will be handled on a case-by-case basis.**
9. **Please discuss interview attire with your nominees. While business/professional dress is not required for the zoom interview, please encourage them to dress presentably/modestly and to choose a background that is well lit and not noisy to conduct the interview.**
10. It is suggested that you help your nominees prepare for their interview with the judges, and when a performance or portfolio is a category requirement, you view it.
11. **The decisions of the judges are final.**

## **AWARDS**

1. One winner and one runner-up are selected in each of the 14 categories.
2. The winner will receive a Golden Eagle statue and a \$2,000 check.
3. The runner-up will receive a plaque and a \$1,000 check.
4. All nominated students receive a commemorative Golden Eagle Nominee graduation cord.

## **GOLDEN EAGLE AWARD CEREMONY**

The Golden Eagle process culminates with an awards ceremony.

1. The winners of the Golden Eagle award and runners-up are announced that evening, which, until then, remain a secret.
2. All nominees, by category, will be introduced by the award presenter. Winners receive a Golden Eagle statue and a \$2,000 check. The runner-up will receive a plaque and a \$1,000 check.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION or QUESTIONS?**

**Contact: JoLee Henson Carlson at [jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com](mailto:jcarlson@unitedwaycg.com)**