

The REPORTER

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Vol. 26, No. 24

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

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HUNDREDS OF PARENTS, family members and friends joined 76 OVUHS seniors at Saturday's graduation ceremonies at Markowski Field with many people sitting on chairs in the field, while others watched from the bleachers.

--Photo by William Haig

'Truly deserved'

Markowski Field serves as OVUHS graduation backdrop

BY KATHERINE LAZARUS

BRANDON — On a sunny, beautiful day that saw 76 Otter Valley Union High School seniors graduate on a well-spaced Markowski field, in observance of loosened pandemic guidelines, Principal Jim Avery said afterward that the event was a "brand new way to hold a graduation, so this class gets to set the standard."

Adorning the stage were vibrant bouquets donated by the Brandon Florist Shoppe, while blue and white balloons highlighted the canopy that was set up on the field this past Saturday, June 12.

Of the seniors who earned their diplomas, through a pandemic-filled school year, Avery said theirs was a graduation "truly deserved."

Mirroring the sentiment of many in the crowd of hundreds, spread out in the chairs on the field and in the stadium, Class

"I say, we learn to redefine life's imperfections—learn to see the beauty and value of life's trials and setbacks. Let's honor our experiences and honor our challenges,"

— Grace Coolidge
Salutatorian

Valedictorian Mia Politano opened her speech to students, family and friends with the exclamation:

"Wow, is it nice to have the opportunity to greet so many people!"

Politano added: "Little did I know that it would take a global pandemic for me to fully understand and appreciate the mean-

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ing of Otter Valley's motto, 'Better together.'"

Following a year and more of COVID restrictions, the graduates smiled with excitement in their blue and white gowns that each boasted a red carnation.

Although "clearly this class was impacted the greatest by the pandemic and certainly the longest," Avery said, everyone showed resilience by coming together to participate in the ceremony.

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life's imperfections—learn to see the beauty and value of life's trials and setbacks. Let's honor our experiences and honor our challenges," Salutatorian Grace Coolidge said.

Rows of lawn chairs were set out, with extra space on the bleachers to host as many people as possible, a welcome change from restrictions of the past year.

After the commencement exercises, graduates hugged, and everyone took pictures around the property. "It was a beautiful

ceremony—congratulations and I'm proud of them all," said Tyler Delancey, friend of graduate Rune Speyers.

Having conquered not only school but also COVID-19, the Otter Valley Class of '21 surely earned a celebration for facing the unexpected.

"Like I learned in biology, the diversity of life is what makes the world so beautiful, so take pride in those differences," Politan told her classmates.



OV Valedictorian Mia Politano encouraged her classmates to embrace their differences and as well as celebrate their togetherness.

Photo by William Halg



Young boy hangs on, anticipating the day he'll graduate.

Photo by William Halg



Smiling at the crowd, Salutatorian Grace Coolidge urged her classmates to honor their experiences and challenges.

Photo by William Halg



Proctor High School spelled



At Otter Valley, the graduates



Family members peruse year



At Otter Valley, the graduates excitedly wait their turn to be called for their diplomas.

Photo by William Halg



Family members peruse yearbook photos.

Photo by William Halg