

Otter Valley leaves its graduates with thanks, encouragement and advice

06-11-2022, Rutland Herald, by Keith Whitcomb Jr.



Otter Valley Class of 2022 graduates toss their caps in the air at the end of their graduation ceremony on Saturday at Otter Valley Union High School's Markowski Field.

Photo by Jon Olender



Otter Valley Class of 2022 graduates proceed out of Markowski Field as “Pomp and Circumstance” plays at the end of their graduation ceremony.

Photo by Jon Olender



Class of 2022 Otter Valley Union High School graduates and their families gather on a blue sky on Saturday at Markowski Field.

Photo by Jon Olender



Otter Valley Union Class President Marissa Connors turns her tassel at the close of commencement exercises on Saturday at Otter Valley Union High School in Brandon.

Photo by Jon Olender

BRANDON — Dragonflies filled the air under a sunny sky Saturday as Otter Valley Union High School bid farewell to the 72 members of the Class of 2022.

Held at Markowski Field behind the school, the event was a tight affair with blue-gowned graduates facing their friends, families, and teachers as speakers reminisced about the past four years, shared advice and encouragement.

Salutatorian Kieran Williams thanked his parents, siblings, and teachers for their support during his academic career.

“And lastly I’d like to give a shout out to a specific friend, Sophie Moore,” he said.

He met Moore a year and a half ago when she was in eighth grade. They met during theater — something Williams is glad for.

“She was a fearless young lady who didn’t care what others thought. She wasn’t afraid to be herself,” he said. “Yet myself at the time, a supposedly mature 11th-grader, was too afraid to show himself to others; afraid that I would displease others. But I saw Sophie’s attitude and decided to follow suit. And through this attitude I was able to find who I was and I have never been happier in my life.”

She helped Williams without even trying, he said. He thanked her and told her to remember, “Life is a highway.”

He asked those present to think of someone in their lives who has impacted it the way Moore has his.

“Would you be a different person to who you are now if you didn’t know them?” he said. “What kind of person would you be? Think about that for a moment and let the memory sink in. Then just simply thank them.”

Many people over the past four years have shaped the Class of 2022, including the graduates themselves.

“Now Class of 2022, I could say something about how I want you to make a difference in the world or that I want you to be successful and rich and famous but what I really want for all of you, is happiness,” he said, adding that he agrees with the Dalai Lama in that the purpose of life is to be happy. “Now there will always be hard times, I know, but the best thing you can do after high school is try to do things that will make you happy.”

After offering thanks and congratulations, Valedictorian Olivia Depatie had some advice for her fellow graduates.

“My first piece of advice is to never stop learning,” she said, not that one should seek to be in school for the rest of their lives, but rather “... learn from the experiences you have, chase your passions and learn as much as you can about them, and to learn from other peoples’ perspectives.”

Everything in life can be a lesson about one’s self or the people and world around them, she said.

“My second piece of advice is to be open to new opportunities, take them when they present themselves, and make your own,” she said. “You are going to have a bunch of new experiences presented to you in your life.”

She talked about her own decision to attend early college at Castleton University as an example of taking an opportunity when presented. While it caused her to miss out on several things, what she gained in knowledge and experience was valuable. She learned to express herself, but also how to take responsibility for her own academic career.

“Each day will be different and making sure you complete all of your work is your responsibility,” she said. “You will need to work on your time management skills, which will take a lot of effort — trust me, I know — and, more importantly, you will need to figure out what will work best for you,” said Depatie.

She said she’s learned to take every opportunity life offers, even if they don’t pan out the way she had in mind.

“No matter what you choose to do after high school, whether that (will) be going to college, traveling, getting a job, or anything else, every new experience you have, and every choice you make, will teach you something about yourself and the world around you, if you care enough to pay attention,” she said.

In her farewell address, Class of 2022 Treasurer, Alice Keith, bid a special goodbye to outgoing Superintendent Jeanne Collins and outgoing Principal James Avery

“Thank you both for everything you have done for our school,” said Keith. “You have made a lasting impact and we will forever be grateful. We wish you both happiness in your years to come.”

She reminded the class to enjoy the moments the future gives them

“Some say high school is some of the best years of your life,” she said. “Well, we’ll see about that, but I can proudly say we have all come so far individually and as a class. Every one of you should be proud of all you have accomplished.”