

# Otter Valley grads focused on finding happiness, chasing their passion

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BRANDON — The bleachers at Markowski Field were overflowing on Saturday, June 11, as members of area communities showed up to support the graduating senior class of 2022. Families, friends, faculty, and staff all looked on in anticipation. The air was sweet and tinged with jubilation. It was a perfect day for these graduating seniors to kick off the rest of their lives.

The nearly one-hour ceremony began, of course, with Pomp and Circumstance serenading the graduates as they began their procession around the edges of the Markowski bleachers and across the fields to take their seats.

The entirely student-led ceremony began with Elijah Tucker Bryant's leading the crowd in the pledge of allegiance and was followed by Miley Lapp's rendition of the National Anthem.

Hayden Bernhardt delivered the welcome speech next, encouraging his fellow graduates to live in the moment. "Right now is the good old days," he said. "So, no matter where you are or what you're doing, make the most of every second and opportunity you are given because every day is a blessing."

Salutatorian Kieran Williams's ensuing speech was a further declaration of happiness and gratitude. "The Dalai Lama says that the purpose of life is to be happy," he said. "And I believe there is no truer statement."

"In high school, we each found a way to be happy, but now we'll have to find some way else to be happy," he continued. "There is no path to happiness; happiness is the path. Find what makes you happy and follow that."





Valedictorian Olivia Depatie followed Williams, giving a sweeping speech thanking the faculty and staff for their help before congratulating her fellow students and giving them some sage advice.

“Congratulations on every single accomplishment that makes you proud of yourself,” she said. “Yes, we are here to celebrate your successfully making it through high school, but we are also here to celebrate all you have accomplished to help you be where you are today.”

“Learn from the experiences you have,” she continued. “Chase your passions, learn as much as you can about them, and learn from other peoples’ perspectives. Everything you do in life can teach you something about yourself, the people around you, or the world around you, so take advantage of this and learn.”

Alice Keith began her farewell address by speaking directly to outgoing OVUHS Principal Jim Avery and RNESU Superintendent Jeanné Collins. “Thank you both for everything you have done for our school. You have made a lasting impact, and we will forever be grateful.”

Next, she turned her attention to others in the crowd who helped the graduates along their way.

“Thank you to the teachers, parents, families, and friends who have guided and supported our class through the rollercoaster of emotions that came as a package deal with our high school careers,” she said. “That was a full-time job on its own, and for that, we thank you.”

Finally, she addressed her classmates with a bit of earnest advice and humor. “As you embark upon all the greatness your future holds,” she said, “I ask that you all strive to be the best versions of yourselves, work hard, do what makes you happy, and always be on time!”

And just like that, it was over. The merry gang of graduates tossed their caps in the air and paraded back up the hill and into the arms of their loved ones. The world awaiting them just a little further down the road.