

**BANNERS:**  
Community stepping up for 2020 grads

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project has been in the works for about a month, and the banner project fundraiser officially kicked off Monday, June 1, with an online Go Fund Me campaign and a goal to raise \$1,600.

C4C, the City, SHS, students, parents and others are collaborating with the goal to gift each graduating senior with a keepsake banner.

Organizers envision the festive, cheering effect of having more than 100 banners—one for each senior—flying from lampposts throughout downtown Sisters on or around Graduation Day, June 12.

Banners are set to feature students' first names and photographs. After they are displayed, the banners will be offered to the graduates as keepsakes.

C4C's youth board member, Olivia Bertagna, first suggested the project as a way to boost community spirit and recognize local students during what has been a difficult period.

"COVID-19 has taken so much away from local students," said Bertagna, a junior at Sisters High School. She said the senior class especially has missed out on many once-in-a-lifetime activities.

"This project will show the seniors their community loves and supports them through this time. It gives them something new to be excited about. We really want to give them and the whole community something to celebrate," Bertagna said.

Bertagna joined the C4C team this past winter. As youth board member, her goal has been to find ways to strengthen ties between students and the greater community.

She had seen the banner idea implemented well in Sweet Home. Bertagna said she was inspired by that and further encouraged by C4C's

recent Let's Talk! discussions, where the focus has been on finding ways to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and to help people, businesses and community morale in general.

C4C has donated \$1,250 as seed money toward the project, which will cost about \$2,850 in total. The project team hopes to raise the additional \$1,600 this week. Any donation amount is welcome, and donations are 100 percent tax deductible.

"This type of fundraiser unites us as a community as we come together to honor our senior class," said Bertagna. "I hope to see the community want to help and to give the seniors something special as their high school experience wraps up."

The fundraising campaign can be found online at Go Fund Me under the title: "Sisters High School 2020 Graduate Banners." Any money raised beyond the \$1,600 goal will be set aside for future collaborative projects with the high school.

For its banner project, Sweet Home was able to fund-raise around \$3,000 within days, Bertagna said. She and other organizers are hoping for a similar community response in Sisters.

Organizers have reason to be optimistic, Bertagna said, noting response to project outreach efforts has been very positive. "Everyone seems truly thrilled that the community is working on this for the students. And students are eager to see the banners hung up."

"We all want to help offer our Class of 2020 a warm-hearted community send-off," added C4C board member Amy Burgstahler.

"We think of our local graduates as the ultimate expression of 'Made in Sisters.' We're glad to have them representing our hometown as they go out and take on the next chapters of their lives."

Bertagna and Burgstahler both also serve on the Sisters Country Vision Implementation Team. Burgstahler noted the

visioning process included an informal survey of soon-to-be graduates. While most students said they planned to leave after graduation, they also hoped to return to live in Sisters within 10 years.

"This banner project is an investment in that possible future," Burgstahler said. "It's one small way to say not only, 'Hey, Congratulations!' but also: 'Yes, please do come back home to Sisters!'"

Usually Sisters Rodeo banners fly on street poles

this time of year. But with the rodeo canceled, the rodeo offered its banner space to the Class of 2020.

"We really appreciate the rodeo's support," said Burgstahler.

SHS Principal Joe Hosang, Registrar Lynne Fendall (also a Class of 2020 parent) and yearbook advisor Susie Seaney are among the many community members who have offered valuable support. And the City's Public Works crew has volunteered to install the banners.

Bertagna and Burgstahler said several people have suggested that Sisters repeat the High School banner project every year—that maybe this project marks the start of an annual tradition. It would take another good collaboration, Burgstahler said, noting that access to banner space will be different when next year's summer events resume.

"But it's definitely a great cause—honoring our hometown students—so maybe the community can find a way to



PHOTO PROVIDED

Olivia Bertagna originated the banner project.

make that happen in 2021."

As a nice bonus to that idea, she added: "Then we could make a banner to honor Olivia. She's a Class of 2021 student, and without her this year's banner project would not have happened."

(Note: If donors would prefer to send in a check for the banner fundraiser, they can mail it to: Citizens4Community, P.O. Box 2193, Sisters, OR, 97759. Put "Banner Project" in the memo section. For more about the nonprofit C4C, visit citizens4community.com).



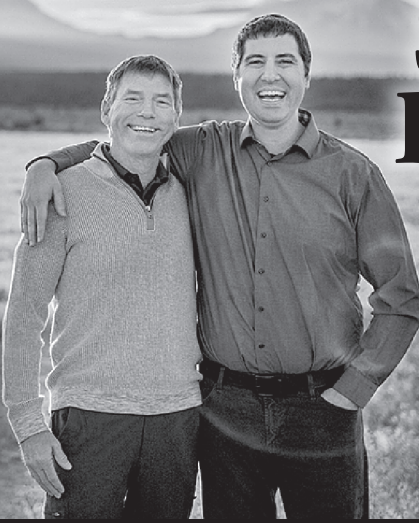
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