

The Dalles graduate strives for space

■ By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

For Paulina Finn, her love of space started with Legos and Star Trek when she was a kid. That fascination with the final frontier has carried on through her life, leading to her acceptance of admission at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., where she plans to major in aerospace engineering — with a goal of exploring the great beyond.

With a determined mindset — adopted out of inspiration from her father Michael, a retired U.S. Navy vet, and mother Flavia, an immigrant from Chile — Finn has dedicated her school life to achieving academic success, first at The Dalles High School, where she graduated in 2018 with honors, and later at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Ore., earning her an associate degree in engineering.

While she knew she wanted to join the U.S. Navy to further her goal of becoming one of the few people to enter space, she first decided to enlist in the delayed entry program. After seeing how things worked, she decided that “I had more in me. I could do more. So I felt, for me, the right thing to do was apply for the Naval Academy,” which offers those interested in doing what it takes to become an astronaut a better pathway to achieving that goal, Finn said.

Finn, having found out about her acceptance to the prestigious academy, will enter the class of 2025 starting this fall. Before that she will be participating in what is known as “Plebe Summer” — a six-week orientation intends to prepare new recruits for the challenges that lay ahead.

“During this time, plebes have no access to television, movies, the internet, or music, and restricted access to cell phones. They are only permitted to make three calls during the six weeks of Plebe Summer,” a U.S. Naval Academy press release said.

“As the summer progresses, the new midshipmen rapidly assimilate basic skills in seamanship, navigation, damage control, sailing, and handling yard patrol craft. Plebes also learn infantry drill and how to shoot 9 mm pistols and M-16 rifles,” the press release said. “Other daily training sessions involve moral, mental, physical, or professional development and team-building skills. Activities include swimming, martial arts, basic rock climbing, obstacle, (and) endurance and confidence courses designed to



Paulina Finn is pursuing her fascination with space at the U.S. Naval Academy. Contributed photo

develop physical mental and team-building skills. Forty hours are devoted to the instruction of infantry drill and five formal parades.”

To get to Annapolis, Finn said people close to her supported her throughout her journey. She credits her time with the basketball team at Umpqua Community College as having built up her confidence and pushed her mentally and physically. Especially at the directive of Head Coach Dave Stricklin, Finn said his method of “breaking you down and building you up” gave her a mental breakthrough and gave her the confidence to strive to achieve her goals.

By the time she received her associate degree from UCC, Finn had begun thinking about applying to the academy. But it hadn’t yet become a reality. So it was a fortunate circumstance that Finn, while working as a waitress at Momma Jane’s Pancake House in The Dalles, started up a conversation on her goals with a customer whose relative had graduated from the military academy. The customer gave her the contact info for John Bickford, USNA class of ’71 — and while Finn held onto his email, after deep consideration, she reached out to him.

Bickford prepared her for the application process, walking her through the ins and outs of the process, and giving her words of encouragement that built upon her foundation of confidence she had received growing through coaches and her parents. He also gave Finn a tour of the campus — a crucial step in her journey, which showed her that admittance was attainable for her.

Bickford coached Finn on what to expect as a midshipman attending the academy, and also guided her through all the hoops she had to jump through — between asking for references, submitting to interviews, and applying for nominations, Finn said she “felt honored” when she first heard the news of her acceptance last month.

“I was proud to have been able to help Paulina achieve her lifelong dream, an appointment to USNA,” Bickford said in an email. “Her motivation was inspirational: She kept on trying in spite of running into dead ends and roadblocks many times during her application process. Her qualifications are superb, and I expect her to do quite well at the academy. Her entering USNA will greatly benefit that institution, the Navy, and our

country. I look forward to following her career through USNA and beyond.”

Beyond Bickford and her basketball coach, she cited her mother as her main source of confidence and inspiration that led her to acknowledge that anything is possible. At a single moment of doubt, it was Flavia who told her daughter to keep going and to continue working towards her goal.

Finn expressed confidence that she is going to make it to space, and the academy is the best route for her to take to achieve it. To her, space is “more than meets the eye.”

It’s an exciting time for space travel, too. With major companies preparing for private travel in the near future and with the advent of the reusable rocket, she said she sees an exciting opportunity to be a part of the search for life on Mars, and to explore what lies beyond our current knowledge of space.

“It’s not just fiction for me, it’s a reality that’s not here yet,” she said. Finn left this one last piece of advice for anyone considering applying to a military academy.

“The majority of the application is believing in yourself,” she said. “The more you believe in that, the more you can make it happen.”

Insitu layoffs influenced by drawback from Afghanistan

■ By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

Influenced by the impending drawback from Afghanistan, Bingen-based drone manufacturer Insitu announced voluntary layoffs on June 8.

Insitu Spokesperson Jennifer Belay did not provide a specific number of employees who volunteered for the downsizing by press deadline but noted the reductions in force targeted Field Service Representative positions, occupied by the employees tasked with supporting Insitu customers in the areas where the drones are deployed.

Because Field Service Representatives are employees who work in those service areas, most notably in Afghanistan, Belay said most of the employees terminated do not reside in the Columbia Gorge since they do not need to report to Insitu facilities.

“In terms of impacts to the Gorge, it’s not really significant. People who chose to take layoff packages ... don’t really live here,” Belay said on Friday.

Roughly 700 Insitu employees reside in the Columbia Gorge, Belay said, confirming that no additional layoffs are planned at this time.

Insitu had been preparing for the moment when operations would subside in Afghanistan, Belay said, and “just like any business, we’re just adjusting what our needs are to support our customer base.”

The drone manufacturing company, which is a subsidiary of Boeing, serves 30 customers globally, primarily through their manufacturing of the RQ-21 BlackJack and ScanEagle drones and support to those customers, most commonly domestic and international military agencies. In this

transitory period through the COVID-19 pandemic and post-Afghanistan, Belay said the company is refocusing its sights and restructuring its workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic shuttered most in-person work at the company’s various facilities, and while management recently announced a process to return to in-person work, Belay said the company is being “very flexible” with the transition.

The company is also preparing for an upcoming demonstration to six countries at ArcticX, a live exhibition featuring the latest innovations in satellite imaging and analytics at Andoya Space Center in Northern Norway.


Insitu is teaming up with The Hood Technology Corporation, a Hood River-based drone support company, by bringing to the demonstration, along with Insitu products, the Alticam 14 payload, which provides intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance services through a high resolution, enhanced telescope and laser designation targeting capabilities.

Despite the closure of one facility last year, which Belay said had been planned prior to the pandemic, as well as the closure of their workforce housing program (the company now instead offers housing stipends to employees), Belay affirmed that “Insitu is not leaving the Gorge.”



“Most of our employees live and work here and care about the community,” Belay said. And the company puts in work to ensure it supports the community-driven mindset, through volunteer work and a donation-match system run by Boeing, which has provided more than \$100,000 to charitable organizations in the community since the start of the year.



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TRASH TALK



Q. Is there a place where can I take old computers, VCR's and other electronics for recycling?
Jared, The Dalles

A. Jared, I don't know of any local options for VCR or stereo recycling. You do have an option in our area for "e-waste" though. The Oregon Electronics Recycling Program (E-Cycles) accepts seven items for free: computer monitors and towers, T.V.s, laptops, printers, keyboards and mice. Three drop sites: Hood River Transfer Station, The Dalles Disposal, and Sherman County Transfer Station near Biggs Junction.

questions to:

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