



Dylan Altheide-Nielson is a senior at Astoria High School.



Kaisa Liljenwall is a senior at Warrenton High School.



Aiko Miller is a senior at Knappa High School.



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Erin Grauff is a senior at Astoria High School.



Mara Dowaliby is a senior at Warrenton High School.



Isabella Morrill is a senior at Warrenton High School.



Micah Sapp is a senior at Knappa High School.

Class of 2020: Seniors still keep in touch

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Seaside High School senior Andrea Castro reminds everyone, “We were going to be the last class to graduate from that school,” as staff and students will move to a new campus in the Southeast Hills next fall.

Castro is involved with the Future Business Leaders of America, among other activities. “I had been doing that since I was a sophomore, and I finally got my best friend to join,” she said. “We had our presentation ready for state competition. We’re doing it online now.”

Warrenton senior Mara Dowaliby described the new routine of Zoom meetings for classes. “A lot of us have college classes, so we have a Zoom meeting every morning, and we have online tests and homework,” she said. “It’s very weird to do it this way, but it works. Our teachers are very good at helping us and making it happen. I never thought I’d do an online school my whole life, but here I am.”

Meanwhile, communities on the North Coast have gone out of their way to show support.

Stadium lights at local fields are turned on at 20:20 (military time) on selected nights, the Astoria Column was illuminated in purple and gold, names of graduates are up on billboards, and senior photos are displayed in the windows of downtown businesses.

All much appreciated, the seniors say. But in the end, all they really wanted was to go to class, finish school, then walk across a stage to receive a diploma. Their senior years have been anything but normal.

“Not at all, not one bit,” Dowaliby said.

The seniors still keep in touch, so to speak — just not in their favorite gathering places or local hangouts.

“We’re all talking,” she said. “It’s just super weird. We all miss each other and going to school, but we’re trying to stay positive and connected through social media and messaging. It’s been hard for all of us.”

Personally, “I’m missing time with the people at school, even the teachers,” Dowaliby said. “At Warrenton, it’s kind of like family. Not being able to see those people and be with them is hard.

“It’s nice that we’re all still in each others’ lives, but missing all those interactions and the fun memories you make at school ... it’s tough with all that being gone.”

In the past, the first week of June for Knappa senior Aiko Miller usually included a trip to Keizer to watch her dad — Logger baseball coach Jeff Miller — and his team play for a state championship, or watching one of her older brothers go through commencement.

“I’ve been to a lot of graduations,” she said. “The thing that makes it harder, is seeing my two older

brothers go through celebrations and ceremonies, and not being able to have that. That’s been hard.”

“Virtual commencements,” which some schools are doing, just aren’t the same.

At Astoria High School, the plan is for students to receive diplomas via cars at CMH Field.

“I like that idea,” Astoria senior Erin Grauff said. “It’s not what we were expecting, but it’s better than recording each kid walking across a stage, then splicing it together.”

Celebrating seniors

Warrenton senior Kaisa Liljenwall said she appreciates people taking the time to celebrate the Class of 2020. “I see a lot of social media posts celebrating the seniors, and where they’re going to school next year,” she said. “I enjoy seeing that.”

Liljenwall was to serve as co-valedictorian at Warrenton’s commencement ceremony, along with Isabella Morrill.

“I was really looking forward to giving a speech,” she said. “Isabella’s was going to talk about the future, and mine was going to talk about what we’ve accomplished. The speeches were going to complement each other.”

Morrill said she will miss what used to be taken for granted.

“Personally, it’s not having the chance to be with my friends, and other people that I’m probably not going to see again,” she said. “That’s kind of how it feels for all of us.”

It was painful enough for the seniors to sit and watch their final year of high school gradually slip away.

When the coronavirus took hold in March, classes were suspended until April 1, then April 28, and finally canceled for the rest of the school year.

Commencement ceremonies for most schools are still up in the air, along with proms, graduation parties and everything else that comes with being a senior.

“The saddest part of it is not seeing the end of the year with my teachers,” Liljenwall said. “I will stay in contact with some friends, but other than occasionally bumping into my teachers at the store, I won’t get to see them every day, and that’s super sad.”

And “missing prom, some of the end-of-the-year things with sports, track ... the last day of school we were supposed to have a little pizza party.”

Liljenwall was a three-sport star — cross-country at Warrenton, swimming with Seaside and she would have competed in track this spring with the Warriors.

“They want to honor us in some way for sure, they just don’t know how,” Dowaliby said of the high

school. “Even if it has to be in July or next fall. Who knows? But I know they’ll make it happen.”

Dowaliby said “perseverance is what we’ll be remembered for. No one has ever had to do this before, and we’re all trying to make our way through it and stay as positive as we can.”

‘Bonded our class’

At Knappa, “in a way, it’s bonded our class,” says Miller. “We communicate about how we feel, missing part of our senior year. The last quarter for the seniors is always the most fun. That’s when you start planning for graduation and parties, the fun activities at school ... and we’re missing all those things.”

Knappa’s Class of 2020, she boasts, was also a pretty bright group.

“I think we’ll be remembered as an accomplished class,” she said. “One of really high intelligence. A lot of really intelligent kids in our class.”

Same at Astoria, said Altheide-Nielson, who was recently nominated for a student-athlete scholarship award.

“We were one of the stronger academic senior classes,” he said. “A lot of the athletes I played sports with were also 4.0 students. You had a good mixture of working hard not only on the field, but also in the classroom.”

Seaside’s graduating class, Castro said, will be remembered “for being resilient, and being able to hold our ground, and able to adjust to what’s going on.”

Morrill said of her Warrenton classmates, “I think we’ll be the class that will be remembered for losing part of our senior year, but also the class that’s going to learn how to make moments matter.”

Morrill was heavily involved in student activities — band president, student body vice president, president for National Honor Society, part of CommuniCare, which raises money for nonprofits, and captain of the debate team.

Dowaliby, meanwhile, is the youngest of four sisters, so she has seen “a ton of graduation ceremonies, high school and college.”

At future class reunions, 20 or 30 years from now, “We’re probably going to hug a lot and be happy that we can be in the same room,” Dowaliby laughs. “To make up for that lost time. Maybe a mock graduation, for the one we missed out on.”

Liljenwall agrees, saying, “I think we’ll talk about all the things we missed out on. It’s kind of gloomy, but the coronavirus is always going to be a topic at reunions.”

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