

PHS:

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“We could not have done this without you,” he told the crowd.

Liscom said seniors earlier in the week visited their former elementary schools, where teachers and students lined the halls to greet them and wish them well. The moment also gave seniors the opportunity to thank the teachers from their past.

“It was a great way to be able to see one more time some of the teachers that had a lasting impact on us,” he said, then thanked families as well for their support and understanding.

Cramp took to the lectern next. Today is about celebration and hope, she said.

“Hope for a bright and beautiful future that may bless all us graduates as we step forth into our next journey,” she said.

The PHS Class of 2022, Cramp continued, is resilient, determined, hard working, compassionate and competitive.

“The Class of 2022 has persevered through numerous obstacles,” she said, “including the obvious COVID-19 pandemic, but also awkward homecoming dances, challenging AP tests, unwanted middle school drama, unbeatable late-night homework assignments, online school, tedious college applications and the demolition of two former elementary schools.”

Change, she said, has been the consistent element in their lives, and simultaneously one of life’s greatest lessons.

Cramp recalled numerous fun moments classmates have shared, from “over-the-top dress-up days” to long bus rides to sporting events to “very competitive boys dance team performances.” The graduation class is full of young business owners, athletes, artists, livestock showers, car enthusiasts and more.

“Our diversity as a class



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Pendleton High School senior Muriel Jones-Hoisington collects her diploma on Saturday, June 4, 2022, during commencement at the Pendleton Round-Up Arena.

will always be our strength, as it has shown us all of our differences and similarities over the years,” she said, “and allowed us to connect in so many different ways.”

Cramp encouraged her fellow graduates to take a slow down now and then to enjoy life and she urged them to embrace failure, overcome obstacles, dream big and treat others with respect.

When senior Lucy Oyama took the mic, she stressed how quickly this day arrived. Just two days ago with five minutes left in her last class, she said, did she fully realize she would not be coming back to high school.

Today is a bittersweet moment, she said, reflecting back on years of shared moments and memories with classmates, but also one to build on. The Class of 2022, she said, made it through online learning and brought back Mud Wars, held a homecoming and a prom.

“Now we’re ready to take that come-back attitude and apply it to the rest of our lives,” Oyama said.

And while this change feels big now and “appears to be grander than anything we have imagined,” one day it will feel small. The swift passage of time, she said, should teach us “never take the moments for granted.”

She urged the class to cherish the moments they have coming before they embark on new adventures.

“I already miss all of

you,” she said, “my peers, my friends, my incredible teachers and role models.”

Dutcher again took the mic to call out the names of honor students. More than two dozen students graduated with high honors, meaning they had a high school GPA of 3.5-3.75. More than 50 students graduated with highest honors, meaning a high school GPA of 3.75-4.0. And 15 students graduated with honors diplomas, meaning they meet all the usual graduation requirements plus earned seven credits in the school’s highest classes.

For the 98th year, PHS presented seniors with Lantern Cups — the award veteran teachers vote on noting students with significant personal development and high academic achievement. The 2022 Lantern Cups went to Liscomb, Oyajima, Keri Kunz and Andy Oja.

Dutcher also said 98 seniors earned more than 340 scholarships. Local groups and organizations provided almost \$208,000 in scholarships, he said, and the grand total for all scholarships, was more than \$4.45 million.

“Pretty impressive number,” he said.

After that, students one by one strode to the platform and accepted their diplomas. And of course the Class of 2022 did one last thing en masse: They moved the tassels on their graduation caps from the right to the left.

Vets:

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Staffing at center of delays

Veteran Ken McCormack, chair of the veteran advisory council for the La Grande community-based outpatient clinic, or CBOC, was first up with several matters.

Community care in La Grande can mean waiting on the phone 20 to 30 minutes for someone to answer because of short staffing, he said, and reimbursement for travel is backed up to last summer. He also said the call center in Walla Walla seems to drop messages and has to handle a larger area than in the past. He also said it took six months for the La Grande facility to hire a registered nurse and another month for the new hire to learn the system.

Kelter said most delays are due to staffing issues.

“We have been trying every hiring flexibility that is available to recruit staff,” he said, but the VA is competing with employers who can offer better pay and incentives. And coaxing people back to work after learning to work remotely due to the pandemic is another challenge.

Catching up on travel reimbursements, he said, also is about staffing and could come down to contracting that out.

“Obviously that will be at higher cost to do that, but we are committed to getting those claims down,” he said.

Recruiting registered nurses “is challenging across the board,” Kelter said, and while the VA has made hiring incentives, applicants might pass because they can get on somewhere else faster. The VA also has cut down its on-boarding process, but the VA still has the obligation to ensure someone

treating vets is safe.

A question from a Umatilla County resident also brought up delays. Shanna — no last name available — said her father is a vet and has hearing loss, so telehealth does not work for him. But she was not able to get him an appointment in person until the end of July. She said she was concerned about moving his care even farther away.

“We’re almost driving two hours round trip to get him seeing providers in Walla Walla,” she said.

Kelter said as a veteran himself and with a son and daughter in the military now, he is keenly interested in access to veteran care, and the delay in his care is a concern. He said he would follow up and look into the situation. He also said her father or whoever is with him can record appointments to review later to help him understand what a provider said.

Discussion on AIR Commission recommendations

Boyd and Kelter also addressed concerns on the Asset and Infrastructure Review — AIR — Commission to modernize and realign the VA health care system. Boyd said at this point, changes to Walla Walla and other places are just recommendations, and implementation will take years. Between now and then, she said, there are going to be numerous steps for more input.

“It’s going to take all of us to come to a good implementation plan,” she said.

Kelter said the question comes down to how do we take the recommendations of the AIR Commission and make sure they have positive results, including balancing the use of technology and in-person care.

He noted this process does not take the place of smart decisions in the field, and when the recommendations ultimately come

down, the VA is looking at some matters that will affect Eastern Oregon veterans.

The VA is looking at more telehealth care in Boardman and Enterprise, and Kelter said he wants to see a provider at those locations more often as well as a nurse.

“The staffing model that we’re pursuing there I think will help in those areas in particular,” he said, adding the VA also is looking at how it can best staff the La Grande clinic to meet veterans needs.

The AIR Commission is recommending to increase services in the Tri-Cities because the need is there, he said, but it remains to be seen what that means for Walla Walla.

“Just because we increase it in the Tri-Cities does not necessarily mean the demand decreases in Walla Walla to where we won’t support those services any more,” Kelter said.

He stressed the AIR Commission is about providing more and better care to veterans, not about cutting costs. And he said shifting Walla Walla’s rehabilitation treatment to Spokane is what is on the plate, but not other services.

One questioner pointed out Boise is closer to Union County than Spokane, so could Union County become part of veteran care out of Boise if changes in Walla Walla go through? That seemed to pique the interests of Boyd and Kelter. Boyd called the suggestion an “interesting thought” and worth looking over. Kelter said this fits with the AIR Commissioners looking at aligning service areas.

Wyden at the end said details will be forthcoming on the next two meetings, but his point in all this is making the government go the extra mile for veterans rather than making veterans go extra miles for their care.

Softball:

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Taber said. “You dream of that since Little League. It’s crazy we got there and did it.”

In an effort to make sure the seniors did not miss out on the local graduation fun, it was set up for them to fly to Eugene and back the night of June 3 so they could enjoy their class graduation party. They flew back after the game to celebrate with family and friends.

“We were all excited to go home and celebrate with those who couldn’t make it,” Taber said. “Get some love and hugs from everyone who supported us all season.”

Daisy Jenness, who drove in the Bucks’ first run with a double in the bottom of the fourth inning, said the season was special after missing last year with a knee injury.

“It’s so cool,” she said. “I

MORE
Check out coverage of the game and photos on Page A10 and online at www.eastoregonian.com.

am super grateful. It has been an amazing experience. It was terrible to have that happen to me, but I’m just glad I was able to get back and finish my season with a bang with all my friends. We have been playing together since the third grade.”

It was the fourth state title for Pendleton in 10 years. The Bucks also won in 2012, 2014 and 2018. Coach Tim Cary said it never gets old.

“It’s priceless,” Cary said. “Just looking at their faces when that last out was made. They are absolutely deserving of being state champions. We are ready to gear up and get another one next year.”

Taber, along with Jenness, Sauren Garton, Faith Broadfoot, Jaden Samp and Brie

Youns, played their last game in green and gold.

“It’s a very special group of seniors this year,” Cary said. “We will miss them dearly next year. They have a great work ethic, great attitudes and are great to be around. Faith has mud on the front of her jersey every game. It may never come clean. It goes to show the work she puts in.”

Between the dirty uniforms and tears of joy, the Bucks accepted the state trophy and their championship medals before donning their graduation gowns and caps.

“Everyone was crying,” Taber said. “That’s the last game we are all going to play together. It’s cool to have that last moment with everybody.”



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