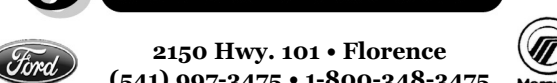




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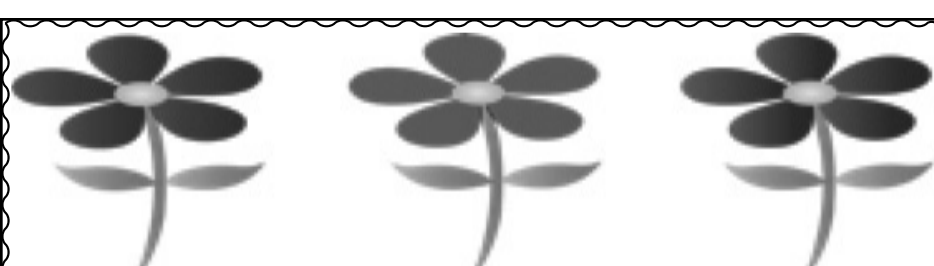
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DIPLOMAS from page 1A

school board, asking for increased teacher involvement in the graduation process. Although the school's tradition had dictated that school board members hand out diplomas, more than 60 of the 84 graduating seniors signed the petition to have two of their teachers hand them diplomas while still including the school board in the ceremony.

In her speech presenting the petition to the board, Elizabeth Luevano said, "Teaching takes a special kind of courage and compassion; and when it comes to our class, a very high patience level. The Class of 2019 wouldn't have come this far without the teachers who were patient despite our impatience. The reason why we are here today is because we humbly request that teachers hand us our diplomas this year and the years to follow."

The school board ended the May 8 meeting without coming to a decision and only later agreed to meet for the special meeting Monday to discuss the issue.

Twenty-one Siuslaw High School students and community members attended the school board meeting May 20, the first full meeting for all seven directors, two of whom were appointed this spring.

The meeting began with Director Guy Rosinbaum reviewing the board's three powers: setting and implementing policy; hiring a superintendent; and setting a budget. According to Rosinbaum, the board would not have the authority to create a policy about graduation, as those should fall to administrators, namely Tatum as principal and Andy Grzeskowiak as district superintendent.

"We have three powers as this board, and running the day-to-day operations of the school is not one of those three powers," Rosinbaum said. "We hire a superintendent; he administers the school. If we don't like the way the school is being administered, then our goal is to fire the superintendent and hire a different superintendent."

FESTIVAL from page 1A

The Rhododendron Festival started on Wednesday with the Rhody Court Coronation, which crowned Queen Rhododendra Madison Reynolds and King of the Coast Patrick Rowley.

"There are just wonderful reviews of the Coronation this year," Hannigan said. "The kids were terrific, and we love supporting them with scholarships."

The King and Queen's float was a big part of the Grand Floral Parade on Sunday.

tendent."

He added that he would worry about future that petitions that go straight to the school board instead of following the regular process for decision making.

Director Bill McDougle said, "If the students had started a little earlier, then the chain of command could have been followed. It could have gone to the principal, and if the students didn't like the decision it could have gone to the superintendent. If they did not like the superintendent's decision, it would have come to us, and that would have followed the pattern that we like to see. Now, we're at the top and we have to make the decision, have to do something."

The members of the board wanted to make it clear that they follow set policy for every decision, and those are created by the Oregon Revised Statutes, Oregon School Board Association's (OSBA) recommendations and court precedent.

"What we have here is a great civics lesson," said Director Bob Sneddon. "On the surface, it seems like just a simple request, but due to the timing and a lot of other things involved, it's a little deeper than what it may sound like."

Director John Barnett emphasized that the board did not have to hold the meeting at all, and chose to do so even though the original petition had not come in as an agenda item or something on which the board needed to take action.

"It's a lesson on how our schools operate, and this is not how we operate. It's not a secret — we make known in our agendas and our meetings that things have to be planned a week ahead of time to be on our agenda," he said.

The full week is often used, Rosinbaum said, to research items and understand the issues and policies at play. At the May 8 meeting, he said he was caught off guard by the petition and would have liked more time to go over it.

At that time, Board Chair Suzanne Mann-Heintz said she was inclined to support the student request.

"I feel like it's their graduation, and I kind of would like to comply in some way with what they requested," she said. "I know it's an important time and most of the students don't have a strong personal relationship with us."

At the May 20 meeting, she said it was all part of the "democratic process" and was glad the students were working together to accomplish their goal.

The rest of the discussion went between all seven of the board members, who took time to talk about policy, their personal opinions and the past.

Sneddon said that graduation ceremonies are of "historical nature," especially as so many community members graduated from Siuslaw and have distinct memories of their own events.

However, for McDougle, he said his ceremony might have had more meaning if his favorite teacher, with whom he is still in contact, had handed him his diploma, instead of a school board member he had never met.

Director Paul Burns restated his May 8 position in support of the board continuing to hand students diplomas.

"It's our opportunity to show the community that we've invested their dollars wisely," he said. It's a culmination of all the effort that we've put in over the years to have the students come through. I think it's a really important piece of our job to be able to have that finality in the presentation of the diplomas like that."

Burns has been a Siuslaw School Board member for 15 years, since before the Class of 2019 was in kindergarten.

"I think it's appropriate that we are involved in that process," he added.

The newest school board member is Dennis King, a retired educator who was appointed to Board Position 5 on April 24.

"I am all for the kids deciding who hands out their diplomas," King said. "If they want to decide they want teachers to hand them out, I'm all for that *if* there's a system that they've come up with that passes muster

with Mrs. Tatum. That falls under the administrative umbrella."

At the end of the board discussion, Grzeskowiak said, "There's got to be some direction coming from the board, because the petition was addressed to the board."

Sneddon moved to acknowledge and accept the student petition and to endorse the concept of having the high school administration and senior class work together to plan an appropriate commencement ceremony.

Rosinbaum seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Mann-Heintz said, "To me, the process that the students went to, the petition they drafted and the fact that a large majority of signed the petition, I am less attached to the outcome than I am to the fact that the students be acknowledged for their process. This is democracy, and this is what we're wanting them to come out of school feeling that they have a handle on."

Tatum agreed to meet with selected students Tuesday to come up with a plan to take before the rest of the senior class. The meeting included Tatum, Siuslaw High School Counselor Steve Moser, Luevano, Senior Class Vice President and petition co-creator Hannah Freudenthal, Senior Class President Hailey Meier, the senior leadership class and two community members, who were there to observe.

"I feel really good that they allowed it to be handed down to the administration and students," Luevano said. "I feel so accomplished. Our work has actually paid off. Things are changing."

During the meeting, Tatum and the students came up with a plan on how the senior class would vote for the two teachers who would be handing out diplomas. They plan to present it to the seniors at the next Project Grad meeting. The rest of the decisions will be handled by the seniors.

"Graduation *is* about the seniors," Meier said. "It's our day. We deserve to have the graduation we want."

Featuring overturned paint buckets, the float, sponsored by TR Hunter and provided by Gary Foglio, included the entire 2019 Rhody Court.

"I'm blown away each year by the number of people it takes to put on the parade," Hannigan said.

Including Florence Ambassadors and Chamber Event Coordinator Rue Schertell, dozens of people volunteer to guide traffic, assign an order to the entrants, numbering more than 80 this year, and coordinate requirements of the various equestrian groups, marching bands, bike riders and more.

"And then the whole town turns out for the parade," Hannigan said.

People lined Highway 101

from 27th Street down to Kingwood Street, where the parade route traveled under the Siuslaw River Bridge and onto Bay Street in Historic Old Town.

The Heceta Head Light-house was the Parade Grand Marshal in honor of its 125th anniversary in 2019. Other dignitaries include Florence Mayor Joe Henry and his wife Pam, Florence First Citizen Dee Osborne and Future

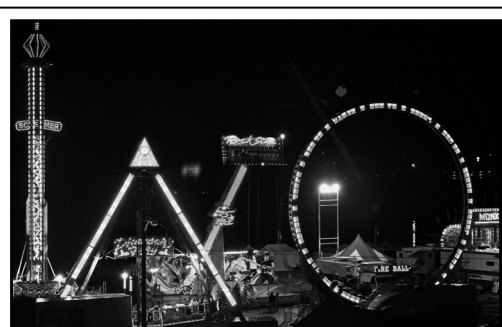


PHOTO BY MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

Davis Shows NW Carnival continues to be a big part of Rhody Days. See more photos on Page A10.

First Citizen Audrey Lowder.

"There's so much tradition involved in Rhody Days," Hannigan said, "It brings people back each year for family get togethers. It's healthy, clean family fun."

And everywhere were the rhodies, many right at the peak of blooming. Coupled with a theme promoting public art, it was appropriate that the City of Florence and the Public Art Committee held a Public Paint at the new mural at Quince Street and Highway 126 to encourage community involvement in Florence's art movement.

"I'm excited to see what else is going on with art in this town and how it will continue to stimulate our economy," Hannigan said.

Additional information about the Rhododendron Festival is available through the Siuslaw Pioneer Museum, 278 Maple St., which just released "Florence in Full Bloom," a collection of memories of Rhody Days' past.

The Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center, 290 Highway 101, will continue to display Joshua Greene's photos of past festivals throughout May. For more information, visit FlorenceChamber.com.

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