

FIRE from A1

to smolder, was described by Fire Chief John Wooten as the “fastest growing fire” he had seen in his career. Thursday’s press release noted that this was due to the mix of “facility construction being all wood, wood products present inside the facility, saw dust build up, open doors and prevailing winds at the time of the fire.” According to a statement from Wooten, the sprinkler system was already overwhelmed and had stopped working when firefighters arrived within minutes of the initial 911 call.

Investigators surmised that the fire continued to burn rapidly because the “fire suppression system on the property was not effective in containing the initial blaze, allowing it to spread.”

The owner of the mill, Walter Whitsell, noted last week that he hopes to rebuild the mill that he helped build nearly 40 years ago.

“Yeah, we’re optimistic. You have to be. What else are you going to do?” said Whitsell.

The mill employed approximately 100 workers, some of whom are now working at other mills around the state.



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Kennedy students were greeted by staff with hugs as they received their diplomas during Saturday's graduation ceremony.



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KENNEDY from A1

Weather forecasts had been deteriorating all week and eventually forced Cottage Grove High School to announce it was moving its celebration indoors. Kennedy, however, armed with plans for its first outdoor celebration since moving to the Delight Valley campus, forged on. A little bit of rain unable to stop the tribe at Kennedy from celebrating in the sun.

The class of 2018 was made up of 20 GED certificates and 22 diplomas and earned more than \$122,000 in scholarships.

“Some of us struggled at other schools. That doesn’t make us bad kids,” said Star Posthumus as she addressed the crowd gathered Saturday. Posthumus, who contended with homelessness nearly her entire high school career, thanked her teachers and said Kennedy gave her the second chance she needed. She said she learned to check her facts, the importance of patience and to work for what she wanted. “For all the people who thought we couldn’t do it, look at us now,” she said.

Amanda Mullen echoed Posthumus, crediting Kennedy with helping her to finish her education after giving birth to her son Weston at the age of 15. She told the audience she’d given up on her education before finding Kennedy and noted her intention to attend Lane Community College before transferring to a four-year university on her way to becoming a nurse. Speaking to her son, she said, “I may have met you a little early but I believe I met you when I was supposed to. Some people said when I had you, my life had ended. But it’s when my life began.”

Teachers fought back tears as they took to the podium to hand out diplomas, stopping to say a few words about each graduate. They described kids who were ready to be adults, who make their way back, who have what it takes, who earned college credit, were eternally curious, forces to be reckoned with, diligent, humble and kids who did it for themselves. And kids who did it for their children.

Future plans for graduates included stints at community college, positions with the county and shifts as firemen and other public servants.

“14 years ago when I started teaching, my mentor teacher said I would never forget my first class,” Ketcher said. “She assured me they would hold a special place in my memory, and they do. And as a first-year principal, I know that I will never forget my first graduating class. The class of 2018... Graduation is huge milestone in a person’s life. During this monumental milestone, always remember the best of times at Al Kennedy High School. Remember the amazing friendships you built, all of the fun field trips and travel experiences, working in the garden and at Quamish Prairie. Remember the teachers and dedicated staff members that supported you along the way. Remember everything that Kennedy means to each of you, because all of us at Kennedy, will never forget all of you. You all hold a special place in my memory and I am so proud of all you...It’s important to be smart, we know you’re smart. But it’s also important to be good and we know you’re good.”

Kennedy teachers played a personalized song as Ketcher stood at the end of each row, gently pushing graduates down the aisle, guiding them once more. This time, toward the future.



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