

Kennedy from A1

Pate also extended her thanks to her parents, friends and classmates for their support and motivation.

"I can't wait to see all the things my classmates and I achieve in the future," she said. "I'm proud of all of us."

Another student speaker, Wyatt Leach, told of his journey from dropout to graduate, explaining that his lack of attendance and focus caused his grades to drop at Cottage Grove High School. On top of that, attempts at counseling were unfruitful.

"A phrase that I repeatedly heard was that I had dug myself into a hole and had to suffer the consequences," he said. "A week later, I dropped out of high school, unsure of my future."

Leach realized he had to turn his life around, but he was wary of Cottage Grove's alternative high school.

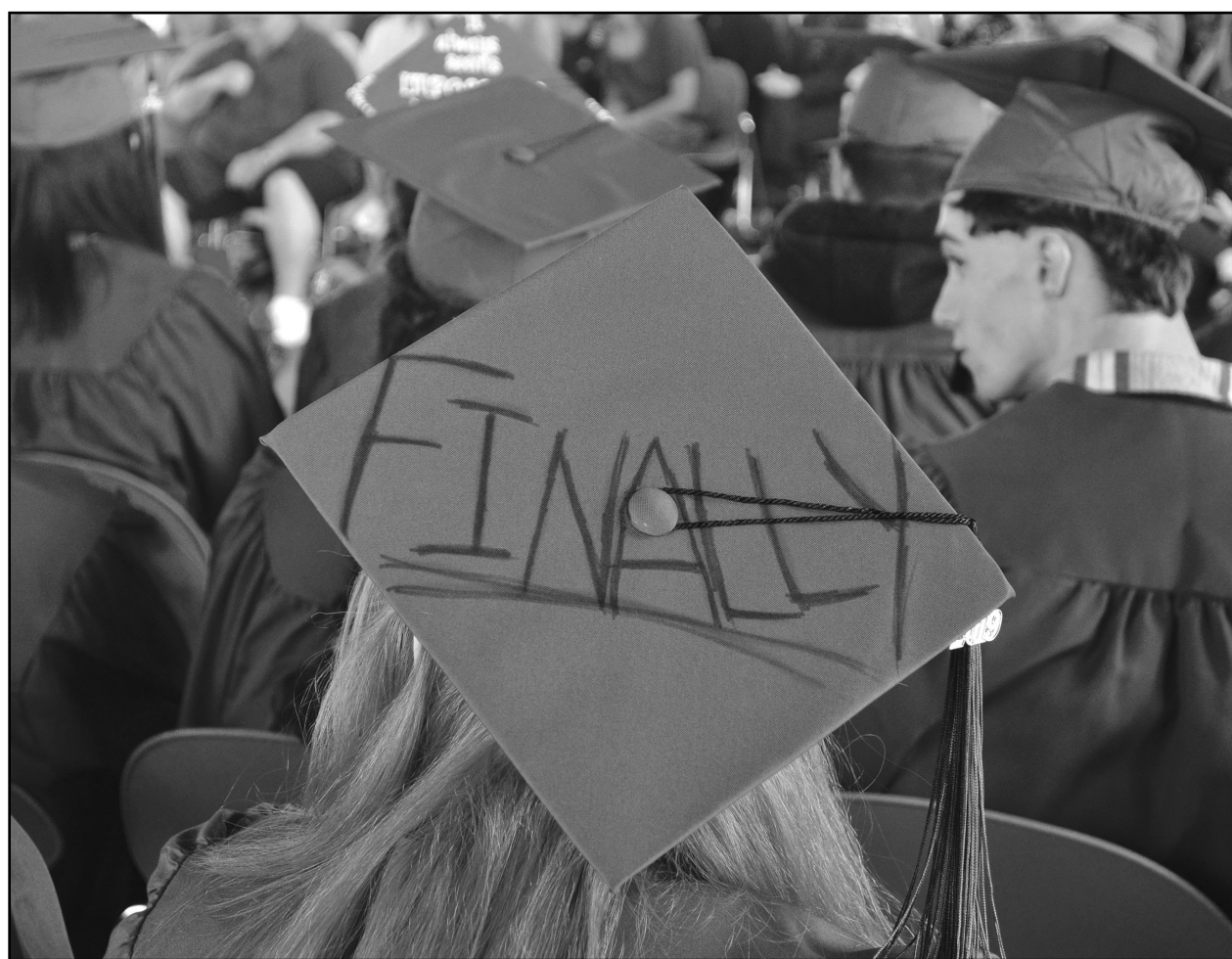
"The problem was, when I was growing up, I was repeatedly told that Al Kennedy High School was the boogeyman school," he said. "It was a place full of juvenile delinquents, bad kids and strict, mean teachers. I was told it's a place you don't want to end up."

However, Leach said the care and attention showed by school staff quickly changed his mind.

"I can now tell you through first-hand experience that none of these rumors are true," he said. "After just a few weeks of attending Kennedy, I realized the teachers at this school genuinely care about their students more than any teachers I've had before in my entire life."

Leach thanked the school staff, his parents and grandparents for their dedication to seeing him graduate, then addressed his classmates.

"And to my fellow graduates, I want to remind you not to believe everything you hear in life," he said. "Please go experience things in this world on your own and form your own opinions with an open mind. If I were to have listened to all the rumors about Al Kennedy High School, I probably would not be standing here today. I hope myself and my fellow graduates can look at today not just as the end of high school, but as the beginning of something bigger and



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

An Al Kennedy senior expresses her thoughts about graduation on the back of her mortarboard cap while sitting among classmates during Saturday's ceremony.

better."

Several scholarships were then presented.

Sherry Duerst-Higgins presented three scholarships on behalf of the Cottage Grove Community Foundation, awarding both the Mildred Smith Memorial Scholarship and Cottage Grove Board of Realtors Scholarship to Margaret Penland and the Chambers Family Lane Community College Scholarship to Greta Kappenman.

Kappenman was then again awarded with the Latham Elementary School Scholarship, presented to past students of the school.

The VFW Scholarship, presented by Dennis Twite, was given to Pate.

Cottage Grove Rotary Scholarships were next

given to Penland and Pate to pursue their careers in culinary arts and medicine, respectively.

Next, the Gear Up Scholarship and Linda Randall Scholarship were divided among students Penland, Kappenman, Melisa Spicer, Thomas Voigt, Braeden Allen, Yovani Robledo, Carson Anderson, Theodor Stark-Sharp, Cody Treadwell, Traevis Giffen and Kassadee Acridge.

South Lane Education Association then presented another scholarship to Anderson, which they provide to students who "strive to be a leader."

Scholarships through the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps went to Tanin, Minson, Destiny Somerville, Zaelin Bull, and Melinda Kane.

Lastly, Al Kennedy High School itself granted scholarships to Somerville, Bull, Minson, Voigt, Leach, Allen, Kane, Anderson, Kaitlyn Vann and Aidan Ellis.

Following scholarships, Ketcher delivered a special message to graduates, addressing the challenges that many students had faced to be where there were.

"The class that sits here before us is made up of talented, charming, caring and inspiring young people," she said. "Each graduating student here came to Al Kennedy for their own reasons. ... No matter what difficulties you may have faced to get here today, you should be filled with a great sense

of happiness and accomplishment. ... Those struggles have only made this moment sweeter and have made you all stronger in the process."

Ketcher took the opportunity to acknowledge

the people who supported her in achieving her own dreams.

"I encourage you to remember that many people helped you to get to school every day and gave you the strength to believe in yourself throughout this process," she said.

Teachers then took turns introducing attending graduates individually, commending the accomplishments, traits and potential of each before handing them their diplomas.

"One of the core beliefs of our school is that we strive to establish meaningful relationships with all of our students," Ketcher said.

Scrima then presented the graduating class and the ceremony ended with a recessional song performed by high school staff David Heritage, Danny Henson, Aimee Cooper and Matt Hall. As each of the 27 attending graduates walked one by one from the ceremony, personalized verses were sung to commemorate their achievements and highlight their personalities.



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