### AKHS from A1

over the school year.

"These chairs represent the loved ones that, although lost, have not been forgotten," she said. "I imagine people sitting in these chairs being part of this important ceremony and this important stage of the students' lives."

Following a moment of silence, AKHS graduates took the podium to reflect on their lessons learned during their time at the

Ketcher first introduced Isabella Dove, who Ketcher said had been a positive role model for her peers and a dedicated participant in the school's conservation program.

Dove spoke of her admiration for Al Kennedy High School and its teachers, praising the deep relationships and personal motivators a small school can

"I went to three different high schools and Al Kennedy is by far the best," she said. "I got more credits here in two trimesters than I did in my prior two years of high school."

Practical life skills were a part of her curriculum, too. "They even taught me

my rights in case I ever get arrested," she said to laughs. "You guys let me be myself and I cannot thank

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you enough because that in itself is the reason why I'm standing here today."

Dove also praised teachers who inspired her to continue learning and to persevere through hard-

"You're all amazing and you're all part of the reason this is the best school I've ever attended," she said.

Ketcher then introduced Owen Dragt, who she praised for using the school as a turning point in her

"The progress that I have seen her make over the past two years deserves to be celebrated," said Ketcher.

Dragt reflected on her time in a conventional high school, which she said she had difficulty connecting with, and lauded Al Kennedy High School's alternative approach.

"They can apply different teaching methods to individual students, which is something that you can't really get at a bigger school," she said. "I am so proud for this to be my school."

Graduate Ioshua Cox took the podium next and led the audience on a light-hearted reflection of society's relationship to

Quoting the movie "Kung Fu Panda," he relayed the wisdom of a contemplative character: "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow

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is a mystery. But today – today is a gift and that is why it is called the 'present."

The perspective should find relevance with students of AKHS, many of whom have had to overcome steep obstacles in their past.

"Not many of us were cut out for the mainstream school experience," said Cox. "And if it weren't for Al Kennedy, we probably wouldn't have made it."

Cox cautioned that brooding on the past must be tempered by extracting lessons from it. He encouraged the audience to take command of their present to build agency for their own futures. One way to do this: appreciation.

Cox listed his own reasons to be thankful for his environment and the teachers who guided him.

"As for the future, I don't think it's quite happened yet. And I don't think it ever really will because every time we get there, it just becomes the present again," he quipped. "But with a group of young men and women like this, I'm sure it'll be as unique as our pasts and as treasurable as

Ketcher again addressed the audience and noted how difficult the past year of distance learning was for students who couldn't take full advantage of Al Kennedy High School's opportunities. A typical year would see around 40 to 50 graduates, she said.

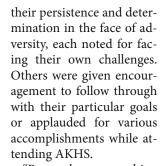
"Graduates, no matter what difficulties you may have faced to get here today, you should be filled with a great sense of happiness and accomplishment," Ketcher said. "You have all put in so much effort to be able to sit here today and know that you've earned the right to sit here."

Like the students, Ketcher praised the opportunities the school has provided despite a harrowing last year, including its GED program which helped seven students this year and "sustainability cohorts" which helped another seven students earn a high school diploma.

Teachers then took turns to share their appreciation for each of the graduates in attendance, complimenting them one by one on their individual accomplish-

Many were praised for

GENERAC



"Remember everything that Al Kennedy means to each of you," said Ketcher. "Because all of us at Kennedy will never forget any of you."

The ceremony ended with a recessional song recorded by high school staff. As each of the 12 attending graduates walked one by one from the ceremony, personalized verses were sung to commemorate their achievements and highlight their personali-

## Mayor's Bike Ride rolls out this Saturday

On Saturday, June 19 at 10 a.m. in Row River Trailhead Park, Cottage Grove Mayor Jeff Gowing will be meeting up with any interested members of the community for the annual Mayor's Bike Ride.

The bike ride will start

in Trailhead Park (north side of Main Street at 10th and Main streets) with riders going three miles to the Mosby Creek Trailhead. There will be refresh-

ments at Mosby Creek Trailhead. Riders then can return to town or continue on the trail.

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