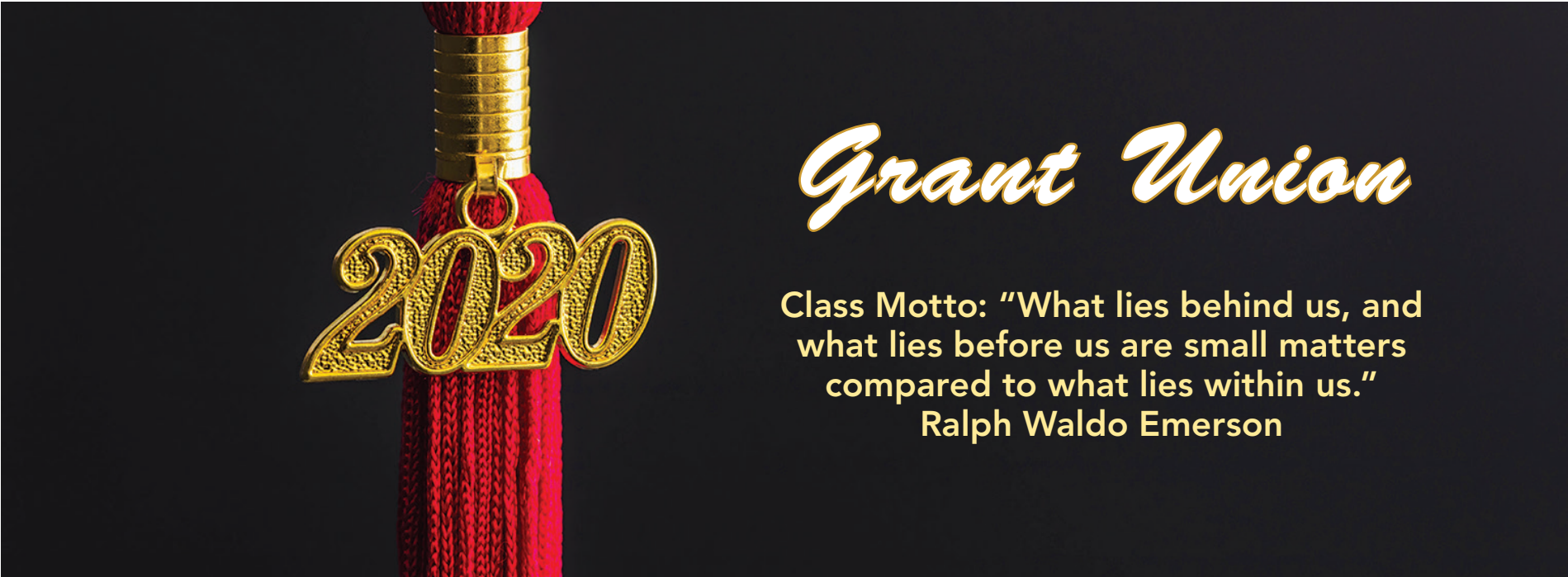




Grant Union

Class Motto: “What lies behind us, and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson



Drew Lusco
Valedictorian

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.
“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

Some of you may recognize this quote from Tolkien, and I cannot think of a more appropriate quote to apply to the situation that we find ourselves in. The good news is that we’ve done it. We overcame, despite losing the back half of our senior year. We did it. Now; my job for the next few minutes is to recap our last four years, entertain, and leave you feeling inspired and ready for whatever comes next. I can’t promise that I’ll do a fantastic job, or even an acceptable one. But, I’ll sure try.

First off, I must thank a few folks for their help along the way. Without them, I wouldn’t be up giving this speech. I’d like to thank my friends, family, coaches, teachers, church family and pastors, community, and of course my wonderful girlfriend for supporting me, mentoring me, shaping me, and helping me to achieve my goals. My mom deserves a special thanks; she fed, clothed, and supported me. Offered advice when I needed it and help when I was overwhelmed. Without the support of these individuals and groups, I would not be the man I am today; or have accomplished any of the things I take pride in. I cannot overstate the appreciation I feel towards my community for the opportunities you have afforded me.

Speaking of appreciating my friends... Who here remembers the 2019 Science Club trip? I vividly remember Donovan falling off the top bunk and smashing his chin on my pickup keys on our bedside table. When we all panicked and thought our treehouse was going down? That was quite a night. This is an excellent example of my first piece of advice: surround yourself with smarter, kinder, and harder working people than yourself. Seek out people who have qualities you wish you had. Spend as much time as you can around them. You’ll find that these qualities are contagious and that “iron sharpens iron”.

Although I’m proud to be valedictorian, I’m more proud to have been involved with you guys in athletics, clubs, and in community service projects. Our extracurricular activities have brought us closer together and undoubtedly improved our relationships. We have formed friendships and relationships, some of which will be lifelong. Not only have we had a blast doing these activities, but we have become better men and women because of the caring mentors we have had through participating.

This brings me to my next point: you truly can do anything you set your mind to. In the 7th Grade I decided that being valedictorian was important to me. I made it not only my goal, but my mandate. In my mind, anything less than achieving my goal was failure. I used this as “fuel for the fire”. If studying

an extra half hour per night for one of Mr. Jones’s math tests would bump me up a few points, I would do it. If Mr. Lusco gave us points for completing our review, I would do it. I might wait until the last minute, but I would get it done. I strove to apply myself to every assignment and pay attention in class. It worked. I don’t tell you this to brag about myself. I tell you this because I honestly believe that if you set a lofty, but attainable goal, that you can achieve it if you strive for it earnestly.

A few examples of unfettered determination and raw perseverance come to mind. I remember Frank almost breaking his own neck during a wrestling match because he refused to get pinned. My fellow lineman throwing themselves against bigger, stronger, and more experienced opponents for the sake of the team. Teammates scrambling and fighting, refusing to slow their feet down; taking hold hold of whatever they could find and struggling to make a tackle. I remember classmates frustrated by a difficult assignment finding a way to complete it. I remember us all trudging through Mr. Lusco’s class. Diagramming sentences in Ms. Moore’s class. (That’s still my least favorite thing, ever, by the way.) I can’t make a joke about Mrs. Smith. (She’s just too nice.) I recall suffering greatly because of Ms. Dougarity-Spencer; torturing us with “old people music”. The research papers, science projects, group work, book reports, reviews, homework, and tests, tests, and even more tests.

I approach the end of my speech and have one thought I would like to leave you with. Although we have worked hard and achieved much, this is simply the beginning of the rest of our lives. The world we are about to enter, as adults and decision-makers, faces significant challenges. Environmental issues, political polarization, and growing economic difficulties will only worsen if our generation does not tackle them head on. Let us not face these difficulties in fear or with an attitude of apathy. Use your talents, gifts, and effort to help in whatever you can manage. Most of us don’t have the solution to creating cheap renewable electricity. I don’t know the answers to most of the questions we, as a society, must decide the answers to. I don’t know what tomorrow will bring or what the future holds. I do know that I can make an everyday difference in my community, however. I know I can offer the homeless man sitting outside the gas station a sandwich and bag of chips. I do know that I can offer to mow my elderly neighbor’s lawn or split their firewood for them. I know that I can stop on the highway and help change someone’s flat tire. Buy a Christmas gift for a child who wouldn’t otherwise receive one. Offer my shoulder for a friend to cry on.

Take heart in what you do know: everyday is an opportunity to serve your fellow man. Everyday is an opportunity to better yourself mentally or physically. Everyday is a gift, and we get to use it however we see fit. I only ask you to use your days wisely: better yourself, help others, and have fun whenever possible. Don’t accept mediocrity, and you won’t be caught in the trap of settling for “good enough”. Everyone leaves a legacy. It is now time for us to ask what we want our legacy to be.

As C.S. Lewis so accurately stated, “There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind.”



Taylor Allen



Cinch Anderson



Tyler Blood



Fallen Bolman



Cody Bowden



Gage Brandon



Rylee Browning



Sam Buckhaults



Sierra Cates



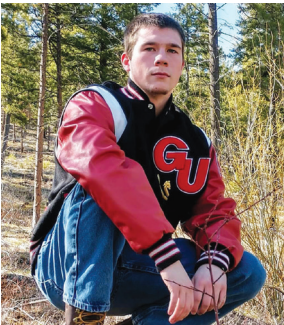
Luke Claughton



Baylee Combs



Caleb Dille



Frank Douglas



Samantha Floyd



Mason Gerry



Airron Glimpse



Nathan Hodge



Russell Hodge



Richard Horton