

Graduation: Seniors 'pushed to the final buzzer'



Continued from Page A1

class so strong," said salutatorian Ella Jesberger, who graduated Thursday along with more than 100 other Seaside students. "Even though COVID greatly affected our lives, I feel like we were still able to grow and succeed with the help of each other."

Ila Bowles and Everest Sibony, two of 10 valedictorians for the Class of 2022, relayed their experience in terms of a basketball game. During freshman year — the first quarter — they encountered the other team's lineup: English, mathematics, and science. By the second quarter, many of them had hit their stride while playing the game.

"Then we have the third quarter, junior year," Sibony said. "We came out of half-time feeling pretty confident, when all of a sudden, we started to hear it: A 6-foot-10, 250-pound transfer from Wuhan would be joining the classes. You all might know him. He went by the name of COVID-19. It definitely caught us off guard, and I'd even say he got the best of us for a while. But everyone knows a good team will beat a single great talent in the end."

While COVID-19 might have been the opposition's ringer, the Seaside students had a ringer of their own: the staff and board who helped them get through the pandemic without missing a beat.

"Nobody could have prepared for what it brought, but you all responded, and that's what matters," Sibony said.

Finally, the fourth quarter of senior year arrived and the students strove to put their struggles with the pandemic behind them.

"We were ready to push through anything that came our way," Bowles said. "No matter the amount of 'senioritis' we faced, we pushed until the final buzzer. ... We've been through a lot together. We've been shoved into the wall, pushed onto the ground and spit at, but that did not stop us from leaving that court with a victory."

Despite the unexpected challenges, she reflected

fondly on her time in high school, adding, "Even though we are stepping off the court for the last time, we will forever be Seaside Seagulls."

Several of the seniors also stressed the importance of being heavily engaged in school activities and extracurricular programs — something they sorely missed while learning remotely during the pandemic.

Valedictorians Aiden Ousley and Liam Matlock recalled watching a video put together by outgoing seniors during their freshman year. It contained oft-heard advice, such as not procrastinating and asking for help. They were encouraged to get involved, which "would always seem secondary to academics," Ousley said.

At first, he didn't take the advice to heart. Then he pandemic hit and they were relegated to staying in, not socializing, and joining classes virtually from home, and they gained new perspective.

Coming into senior year, Ousley said, "I thought back to that advice: Get involved."

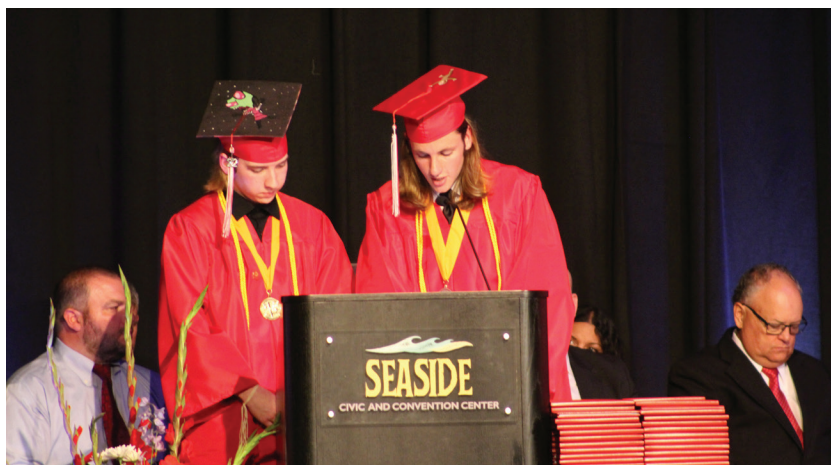
It spurred him to become a three-sport athlete, join Future Business Leaders of America, and attend every school-related activity and function.

"It sounds like a lot of work, but I was having more fun than I'd ever had before," Ousley said. "I guess what I'm trying to say is, don't let it take a global pandemic for you to realize that things need to change."

Matlock agreed. "Being involved in a variety of activities and putting yourself out there really brings out the best version of yourself," he said.

Principal Jeff Roberts also paid tribute to the parents, guardians, family members, and other loved ones—along with the administrators, teachers and staff from all the Seaside schools — who supported the students along their K-12 journey.

"We often hear, 'It takes a village,' and that is one of the most special things about this community," he said. "It is a village, and we look out after our own."



TOP LEFT: From left, Seaside High School seniors Alondra Jimenez Mota, Reese Taylor and Hailey Hughes wait to walk in graduation ceremony for the Class of 2022 on June 9.

ABOVE: Senior members of Seaside High School's choir perform during the graduation ceremony.

LEFT: Seniors Liam Matlock and Aiden Ousley, two of the valedictorians for the Class of 2022, give a speech during Seaside High School's graduation ceremony on June 9.

Photos by Katherine Lacaze

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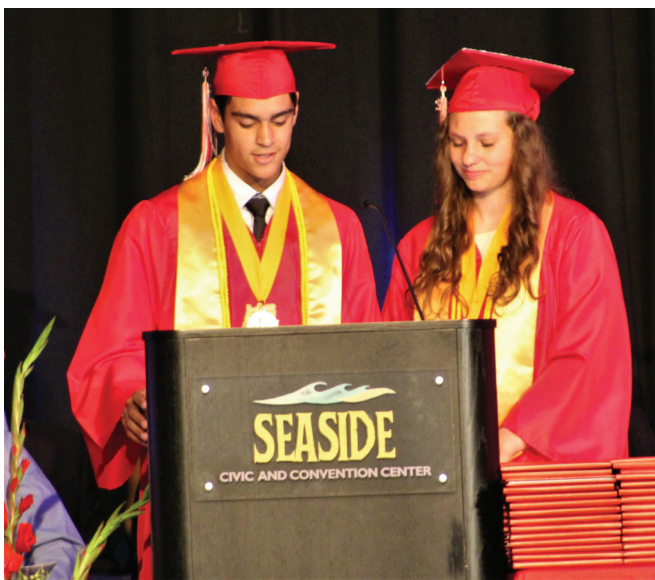
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ABOVE: Seaside High School graduates Everest Sibony and Ila Bowles, two of the valedictorians for the Class of 2022, speak during the June 9 ceremony. **BELOW:** From left, Seaside High School 2022 graduates Erin Owsley, Sandee Adriano Luna, Karina Nolasco Huanosta, McKenna Roberts and Anna Knoch.



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