

Scenes from ACHS graduation



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS Class of 2021 Salutatorian Abigail Swanberg speaks during graduation.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS Class of 2021 Valedictorian Bryce Gunter addresses the senior class, joined on stage by Superintendent Annette Bennett and Athletic Director Chris Dodge.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
The hat worn by an ACHS graduate reads "on to the next chapter."



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS graduate Keity Aloese poses with her diploma.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS graduate Jordan Scott reacts to family and friends in attendance.



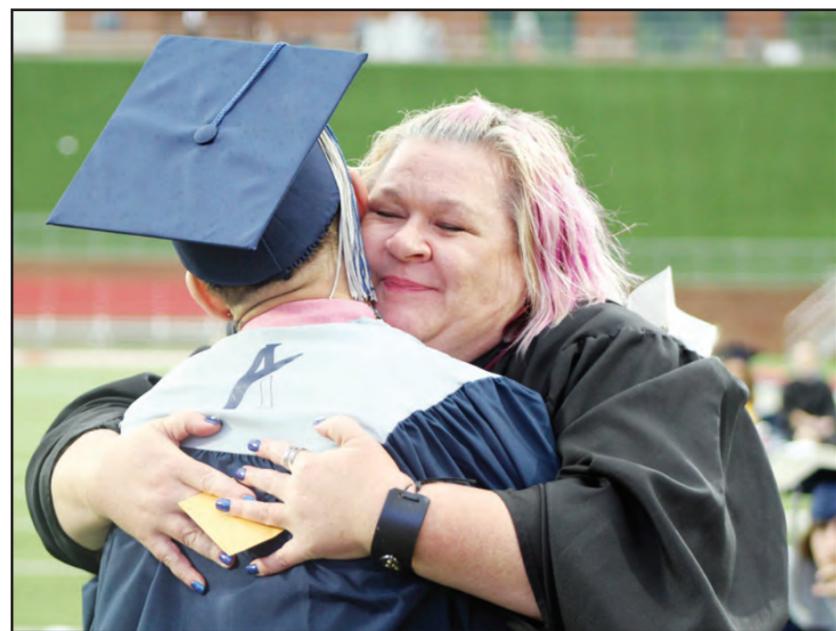
Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS graduates descending the stairs at Liberty University's Williams Stadium.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS held its 2021 graduation ceremony at Liberty University.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
ACHS graduates walk in the procession.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
At left, ACHS teacher Tina Oliver hugs a 2021 graduate. Above, ACHS teacher Kent Maitland and students observe the National Anthem.



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
At left, ACHS teacher Tina Oliver hugs a 2021 graduate. Above, ACHS teacher Kent Maitland and students observe the National Anthem.

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Congratulations, graduates!



Janet Robertson/Contributed
Above is the Appomattox County High School Class of 2021. See more photos on Page 14.

ACHS Class of '21 beats rainstorm, graduates 173

CHARLES CONRAD
Times Virginian

The song lyrics “Rainy days and Mondays always get me down” were once performed by the golden voice of Karen Carpenter in the 1970s. Fast forward to Monday night, the Appomattox County High School (ACHS) Class of 2021 held its graduation ceremony on a Monday

while the threat of rain loomed throughout the evening. However, the rain held off just long enough to not get anyone “down” by waiting to fall just as the event was wrapping up.

When all was said and done, 173 students walked across the stage to receive their diplomas at the ceremony held outdoors at Williams Stadium on the campus of Liberty University.

In a year that was beset with uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a Spring 2020 school shutdown statewide and the necessity of social distancing, mask wearing and virtual learning, along with in-person schedule variations in the 2020/21 academic year, the graduates could say they faced the challenges and came through at the end.

In her opening message, Appomattox County Public Schools Superintendent Annette Bennett noted the challenges facing the school district staff and students.

“I’m extremely proud to say we have overcome the obstacles and struggles to provide the best possible outcome for our students.”

See ACHS, Page 10



Charles Conrad/Times Virginian
An Appomattox County High School graduate pays tribute to her late grandmother on her cap.



Jeffrey Westbrook/Times Virginian

Appomattox Christian Academy’s Class of 2021 — (from left) Taylor Hodges, William Hodge, Justin Duker and Matthew Bremer — graduated Thursday evening. It is tradition at the academy for young men to receive a sword and young women to receive a dagger.

Appomattox Christian Academy bestows grads with swords, daggers

JEFFREY WESTBROOK
Times Virginian

On a beautiful spring evening, Appomattox Christian Academy (ACA) celebrated its graduating seniors in an outdoor graduation ceremony in front of the school Thursday.

Fr. Damien Grout, rector of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church (the parent church of the school), served as officiant for the ceremony.

Taylor Hodges earned the rank of valedictorian and gave a brief valedictory. Justin Duker earned

the salutatorian spot. The remaining members of the Class of 2021 were Matthew Bremer and William Hodge.

School administrators participating in the commencement exercises included former head of school Stacey Torrence, current Head of School Julia Vaughan and Dialectic & Rhetoric (upper school) Principal Terrie Holmes.

The ceremony was a seamless blend of academic celebration and Christian worship service, praising God and remem-

bering the biblical lessons the new graduates learned during their time at ACA. Grout offered the opening prayers, Collect, and led in the Lord’s Prayer, responsive readings of Psalm 29 and the Nunc Dimittis, the Apostle’s Creed and prayers. He also read the Scripture — Ephesians 4:1-16 — and delivered the Address to the Graduates, as well as closing the ceremony with the Benediction (from Hebrews 13:20-21).

In his address to the

See ACA, Page 10

Cornerstone Christian Academy honors grads

MICHELLE PAYNE
Times Virginian

Cornerstone Christian Academy celebrated the accomplishments of its Class of 2021 graduates Friday, May 14. Graduates, faculty, friends and family gathered for the graduation ceremony held at Evergreen Baptist Church.

This year, Cornerstone celebrated the achievements of five graduates: Kayleen Gabriela Caldwell, Brianna Faith Elder, Valentine Harris, Douglas Nich-

olas Sheldon and Matthew Logan Shorter.

Caldwell, Elder and Shorter graduated with honors; Caldwell and Shorter received an honors thesis diploma.

The Rev. Rick Caldwell from Concord Baptist Church was the commencement speaker for Cornerstone.

“It’s always exciting to send each graduate on to the next chapter of their life,” said Susan Shorter, the school’s assistant principal. “It’s also sad to say

goodbye, but we know they are prepared for whatever God has planned for them. As students at Cornerstone Christian Academy, we try to prepare them to know who they are and what they believe! Congratulations to you, Class of 2021!”

Enrollment is open for the 2021-2022 school year. To learn more, visit www.ccaofva.org or call 434-352-2345. Cornerstone Christian Academy serves students Pre-K to 12th grade through Christian and classical education.



Contributed

Cornerstone graduates (from left) were Douglas Nicholas Sheldon, Brianna Faith Elder (honors), Valentine Harris, Matthew Logan Shorter (honors), and Kayleen Gabriela Caldwell (honors).

An upcoming graduation section will feature individual senior photos.

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ACA

Continued from Page 1

graduating seniors, Grout referred to the Ephesians passage and exhorted the graduates to use the spiritual gifts God has given them and which they learned about in their final years of schooling at ACA. He pointed out that God has given them freedom to become all they were created to be.

“Go out into the world, speaking the truth in love,” he encouraged.

Holmes presented the Fruit of the Spirit Award to a senior who displayed those attributes (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness and self-control). The award went to Taylor Hodges, who was commended for — among other things — her kindness to international students.

Hodges also referred to international students in her valedictorian address. She had experienced homeschooling and public schooling, but she had not had an opportunity to attend a private Christian school prior to coming to ACA, and it was something she had wanted to experience. When she visited the academy and learned that there were international students, she was even more sold on the school, as she had wanted to get to know international students.

During this academic year, Stacey Torrence had to step down as head of school for health reasons. She was able to come back for the commencement exercises, and she explained several ACA graduation traditions, all of which are replete with symbolism.

During the seniors’ procession into the ceremony, they each sign the large pulpit Bible from St. Andrews, inscribing both their name and year of graduation. They leave behind with the church and school this record of their presence there, and the school and church staff hope that the biblical knowledge they have acquired during their years of study there will remain with them

throughout life.

Torrence and Vaughan also presented the new graduates with ceremonial swords and daggers. Torrence explained that the tradition began with the first graduating class at ACA. The young men receive swords, and the young women receive daggers. In these gifts abide biblical, historical and character symbolism.

Biblically, God’s Word is referenced as a sword, a spiritual weapon, with this symbolism appearing several times in the New Testament. God’s Word is truth, Torrence reminded them. Historically, swords symbolize honor and nobility; Torrence referenced this country’s history and

literary classics. Swords are also associated with knighthood and chivalry, the quest for the best and highest embodiment of virtues in humanity. In terms of character, swords symbolize honor, strength and courage. In imparting these gifts, the administration hopes for the graduates’ ongoing growth in these virtues. As with the virtuous knights in legends of old, the graduates will hopefully possess the strength and courage to stand for beauty and to seek truth.

The graduates also received beautiful flowering plants as gifts from the chairman of the school board.

ACA is a classical Christian School and is

accredited by the Association of Classical Christian Schools. A classical curriculum focuses on developing wisdom in students, providing excellence of education, imparting the arts of learning and thinking well, all in the framework of a Christian worldview. It imparts critical thinking skills and embraces the best in traditional educational standards. In addition to the standard school subjects, classical schools also teach Latin, grammar, logic and rhetoric.

ACA is a ministry of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church. For more information about the school, visit its website at www.appomattoxchristianacademy.com.

ACHS

Continued from Page 1

Bennett said. “I cannot downplay how difficult this year has been for everyone in our school community, but the resilience of the Raider Nation has prevailed. Staff, students and parents have pulled together and pulled through to complete the 2020/21 school year successfully.

“Singer/songwriter Bob Marley wrote, ‘You never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice.’ The ACHS Class of 2021 will not be defined by a pandemic. Instead, you will be defined by your strengths as measured by your academic achievements, your athletic excellence and your perseverance through difficult times.”

In his moment of reflection speech, ACHS

Principal Poldi Moreno considered the fact that in a matter of moments, the Class of 2021 would be official graduates not so long after beginning their educational journey.

“Over the last few months, your parents have looked at you and wondered just where did time go,” he said. “They wondered how in the world you’ve grown up so fast. While they look at that high school senior who stands before them, they still see that 5-year-old who walked into primary school 13 years ago for kindergarten.”

As per his annual graduation custom, Moreno recalled a handful of personal memories of students whom he does not publicly name — but they know who they are. Here are two of those stories:

• “One day I was investigating a potential scuffle

in one of our bathrooms, and when I talked to one of you about what may have happened, I noticed that you had scratches all over your arms. You told me your story, and I asked you, ‘Where did you get those scratches?’ And your response was that you were attacked by peacocks at your job.”

• “One of you I will always call ‘Billy Ray (Cyrus)’ until you get a haircut.”

Class of 2021 Salutatorian Abigail Swanberg addressed her fellow graduates and thanked all who have helped them reach this major milestone of their lives — high school graduation — including families, school faculty and staff, and the community at large.

Swanberg then recalled the old tale that many elders repeat about walking “uphill, to and from

school, barefoot in the snow.” She predicted that what the Class of 2021 has had to endure might top that story in the long run via the pandemic and all of its changes.

“Who knew that when we left for extended spring break in our junior year that we would never have a full week of school again? ... Who knew that we would have to stay six feet away from each other? ... And of course, who knew that there would be a new clothing accessory that you’d have to wear on your face?”

Swanberg also remarked that she wants the Class of 2021 to be most remembered as “a class of winners — winners at athletics, winners on the band field, winners of the arts, academic winners. We are winners because we have become the future leaders and problem solvers. ... When we were told we had

to stay apart for the end of our high school lives, we found a way to work together, and it is together that we celebrate our accomplishments.”

Class of 2021 Valedictorian Bryce Gunter then took the stage and reminisced over the academic lessons learned during their four years of high school, but stated that many other life experiences were gained as well.

“I think the most important thing we gained was not just the knowledge but also the connections, friendships, memories and sense of community. Almost all of us have made many friendships over the past four years ... many of these friendships will continue even after we’ve all gone on our own separate journeys. This is because no matter what, we are all Raiders who are graduating tonight. Everyone

here worked hard to make it this far, and this is what connects us all as fellow graduates.”

In closing, Gunter encouraged the graduating class to be bold moving forward into the next chapter of their lives.

He quoted from what he described as one of his favorite video games, “‘We stand upon the precipice of change. The world fears the inevitable plummet into the abyss. Watch for that moment, and when it comes, do not hesitate to leap. It is only when you fall that you learn whether you can fly.’”

“Graduating is that moment,” he continued. “This is a big change in all of our lives, so do not hesitate to leap into whatever you plan to do. So leap into work, leap into college, leap into wherever you plan to go because I know that you will all fly.”

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