

# TSA Holds Two Days of Graduation

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Holding 17 ceremonies over two days, the Sharon Academy finished up its marathon of graduations with Olly Skeet-Browning and his friends and family on Saturday afternoon. (Herald / Tim Calabro)

Even in a normal year, graduation ceremonies at The Sharon Academy put a heavy emphasis on recognizing each graduate as an individual; that held true even this year, when the typical crowd of seniors and their friends and families, couldn't fill the gym as usual.

This year's class, numbering just 17, celebrated commencement over the course of two days. Throughout Friday and Saturday, each graduate had a 45-minute-long block during which they had the opportunity to gather with a handful of family and friends and a select group of TSA staff for an individual ceremony.

As is TSA tradition, Head of School Michael Livingston introduced each student with words written by their advisors and other staff, and then each graduate gave a speech reflecting on their own life. Most years, those speeches are delivered to a crowd of hundreds, but this year each oration was presented to a unique assembly of 25 or fewer people, to make sure social distancing guidelines were adhered to.

Georgia Quackenbush said delivering her speech wasn't as emotional an experience as she'd initially anticipated.

"It was a little weird to just look out and see my dad," said Quackenbush, noting that her parents were her only guests in attendance for her speech, adding that it was nice to have an audience consisting of only people she knows very well, and who have watched her grow over the years.

For Rory Livingston, who used her speech to reflect on her personal growth when it comes to her competitive spirit and trusting herself, the event was a little more nerve-racking.

Livingston said she was very nervous leading up to her speech, and remembers only bits of the introduction her uncle, Michael Livingston, read before she presented it.

But once it was over, "it felt really good," she said. Even though the graduation was special, she said it was hard missing the last few months of school.

"I remember seniors ... not really going to class, spending time outside," in the spring, she said, something she and her classmates didn't get to do this year at school. And she said, she's sad to miss all the people she used to have class with, and might not see again.

Several of her classmates echoed Livingston's thoughts, saying that without spending spring at school, graduation hardly feels real. During his ceremony, Olly Skeet Browning, the last of the seniors to graduate on Saturday evening, said that when he first started



Olly Skeet-Browning examines his diploma after his commencement ceremony at The Sharon Academy Saturday evening. Skeet-Browning's was the last of 17 ceremonies at the school. (Herald / Tim Calabro)

thinking of his memories of TSA what stood out were “major milestones,” such as making the varsity soccer team as a freshman, winning a basketball championship, and being the lead in “Suessical,” the musical the school put on last fall.

“While they were incredible, it’s not these moments which I relish the most,” he said. “My favorite moments are the ones that happened behind the scenes—the ones most people never got to see.

“The whole school dancing backstage before Suessical is just as ingrained into my memory as me singing my solo in front of hundreds of people.”

He concluded saying that it was little moments—laughing with his friends during lunch, playing darts in the yurt, and conversations with teachers, among others, that Skeet Browning expects to miss the most.

### Other Surprises

Although many of the traditional celebrations for graduates were changed or altered, many people stepped up to make the graduation season special for the seniors.

Sophie Chesnut said her mom and the mother of one of her friends put together care packages for each of the seniors containing surprises such as mugs with quotes from “Suessical.”

Even though her mother was involved with putting them together, Chesnut said she was still surprised to receive the gifts.

“I knew something was going on, I just didn’t know what,” she said. “It made the seniors, myself included, feel really special.”

Blake Fabricant, the athletic director and an advisor, spent about 16 hours recording video of the graduation ceremonies, which he will compile into a single video for all of the seniors to watch together on July 1, so they can see each other’s speeches.

Fabricant’s wife, TSA staff member Kate Fabricant, put together decorative collages of photos of the graduating class.

### Group Gathering

On Saturday evening, to cap off the two-day long ceremony, all of the seniors met with Livingston in the high school gym—the first time they’d all been together since March.

After sharing hellos and hugs, Livingston shared a few words with the graduating class, noting that in a way, he too is graduating with them, as this is his last year he will work at the school—he’s been involved since the school was started by Judy Moore in 1996, and is

only the second head of school in TSA's short history.

"I'm not worried about you," he told the class, looking them each in the eye as he sat in front of them, encouraging each of them to use their brains in the face of fear and anxiety.

"My class has never been particularly intimate," graduate Lowry Newswanger said of the experience, "but in those few moments, we all felt connected. I felt like a greater part of a whole, part of a small community of people I've known for so long."

After gathering with Livingston, the seniors processed outside together, to an assembly of family and friends in cars. In front of this socially distanced crowd the class assembled in a semi-circle, and Livingston announced the class of 2020, and everyone threw their caps.

"I don't know what it is about that cap tossing piece of graduation, but that made it feel like a wrap," said Chesnut with a laugh.

Mary Newman, the assistant head of school, will take on the leadership role in the fall.

"A few months ago," she said, "it didn't seem like anything would be good enough" for graduation. "And maybe this wasn't enough, but it was good."

## Graduates

The 2020 graduates and their plans are Jackson Bradford, working with Bradford Low Voltage; Sophie Lorraine Chesnut, Union College; Sophia Rose DiGuiseppe, gap year; Emma Jordan Foster, Plymouth State University; Nicole Harrington, Castleton University; Aili Veit Johnstone, St. Lawrence University; Rory Frances Livingston, Syracuse University; Lowry Newswanger, Warren Wilson College and Montana Horseman Saddle Building School; Donovan Piccicuto, gap year/ arts program in Ireland; Georgia Anne Quackenbos, Skidmore College; Sunday Quayle, gap year; Laila Birch Reimanis, Cornell University College of Engineering; Cedric Rule-Becker, Bard College; Olly Skeet Browning, Vassar College; Poppy Tans, Smith College; Olivia Katherine Sanford, Colby Sawyer College; and Benjamin Weatherill, Champlain College.

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