Graduate earns degree in medicine, will begin residency at Mayo Clinic

Christopher Lomahquahu
Gila River Indian News

Belinda Galeano, packed-up her life in Arizona to pursue a Ph.D. and a degree in medicine at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science in Rochester, Minn., and will soon be

gin a residency in Pathology at the Mayo Clinic. In an interview she discussed education, studying medicine and words of advice for students who wish to attend a uni

versity.

“My grandmother is Lylah Donahue Mitchell, from Dis


t 7. I was born and raised in Prescott, Ariz., then went to col

lege at the University of Arizo

na,” said Galeano.

After graduating, she moved to Minnesota to pursue a Ph.D. and M.D. She completed her Ph.D. in Biochemistry, with a fo

cus on structural biology at Mayo Clinic in 2015 and recently ob

tained her M.D. from the Mayo Clinic School of Medicine. In her

space time, she enjoys team rop

ing and gardening.

Galeano has always been in

terested in research, and will take

advantage of this opportunity in

the coming years.

“The next step in this train

ing process will be residency in pathology at Mayo Clinic, which

will take several more years to complete. During this period, I will devote some time to re

search,” she said.

Galeano understands that

medicine is a calling that com

bines helping others with mental discipline.

“Medicine draws people who are committed to serving others who also enjoy the mental chal

lence. My interest in pathology was piqued while working with light and electron microscopes during research.”

Pathology is a great specialty for those who are detail-oriented and have an interest in academic medicine studying structures that exist on a really small scale.

Her advice for students inter

ested in going to college or inter

ested in pursuing a career of any kind, “Have an open mind about what you would like to do for a career. Your heart may be set on one field, then realize that you are more passionate about another ca

reer, so take the time to explore what interests you”.

Galeano recommends that students ask their counselors to connect them with people in their field of interest.

“There are plenty of people who are eager to share with you what their careers are like and are very willing to serve as a men

tor to help guide you through the steps necessary to reach your goals,” she said.

College presents its own set of challenges and experiences that requires the help of advisors.

“In order to stay on track, talk with advisors and develop a plan to keep you moving for

ward...set short, intermediate, and

Continued on Page 8

Senior year in the time of COVID-19: Grads reflect on high school

Kyle Knox
Gila River Indian News

A student’s high school jour

ney traditionally culminates at the end of the spring semester with graduation. For graduating seniors, 2020 was anything but
t

tional due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic ham

pered a multitude of tribal events including the Five Tribes Treaty of Peace Celebration and Memo

r-Day celebrations among many others. For the most part, those events can be rescheduled for the following year, but the same can’t be said for a high school senior whose time has come.

Jasmine Elizarrerez and Sus

anna Osife, two graduating se

iors from the Gila River Indian Community, have an intimate

view of completing high school during the pandemic and how their experience changed their end-of-the-year expectations.

Elizarrerez, District 7, and

Osife, District 2, imagined a dif

ferent ending to the spring se

mester than what took place like walking across the stage to roar

ing applause from friends and family as they received their high school diplomas.

Osife attended Coolidge High School and had a lot to look forward to sharing, “I wished I had the opportunity to experience all of our senior days and times with my friends.” Her class had plans for a senior trip, pep rallies, and a trip to Disneyland with

CHS’s Tribe’s club.

Elizarrerez attended Cesar Chavez High School and also missed out on her Senior Sun

set event, where all the seniors watch the sunset on the last day of school.

“I never attended prom be

cause I thought it would make it more special and mean more if I attended my senior year, but with the virus, I wasn’t able to attend,” said Elizarrerez.

Those experiences would’ve

created lasting memories punctu

ated by every senior’s one shining moment at graduation. In the time of COVID-19, many schools honored their students in a variety of creative ways. Due to social dis

tancing and safety precautions, many have developed ingenious ways to execute creative gradua

tion ceremonies.

Osife’s school organized a parade in the City of Coolidge.

“It was fun and exciting be

cause my classmates and I were still able to be recognized,” she said.

There was a virtual cere

mony in addition to a diploma presentation by CHS principal Armstrong and Gov. Stephen Rose

Lewis. Osife said, “of course, I would have loved to have the ex

perience of walking the stage, but I am very grateful for what my school has done for the class of

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Jasmine Elizarrerez with her graduation regalia after completing her se

ior year. Photo Courtesy Jasmine Elizarrerez

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P.O. Box 459
Sacaton, AZ 85147
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2020 graduates.”

Cesar Chavez High School held a drive-thru graduation ceremony. Every student decorated a vehicle and drove throughout the school parking lot, which concluded with receiving their diplomas from the CCHS administration. It was intimate and “interesting,” as Elizarrarez said. “I personally wasn’t a fan of this idea because my family wasn’t able to watch me graduate except on Facebook Live, which was very creative, I’ll say,” said Elizarrarez.

The class of 2020 learned more than they anticipated after the schools closed.

Osife said, “some things I’ve learned was to stay aware of what’s going on and its impact, we may think it’s small and not serious but trust me, it is. During the COVID shut down, I was able to focus on myself, family, health, and safety.”

Elizarrarez stressed, “In such dark times we can often find ourselves staying in a dark mindset, but you just have to believe that, but there’s always something to smile about and something to be thankful for, big or small.” Both students are continuing their academic journeys to assist the Community in the future.

“I plan to study in the field of nursing. I have developed a stronger passion in healthcare since the COVID-19 pandemic. Making sure we have a safe and healthy environment for the Community is my biggest goal,” said Osife. Elizarrarez said, “I will be attending South Mountain Community College in the fall, and the plan is to transfer to ASU or NAU. For now, my plans are to find a major and career that can help people and my Community.”

Though the traditional high school graduation may have been a missed experience, it’s apparent that post-secondary graduation is in the foreseeable future. For now, though, Elizarrarez wants to share with all high school graduates, “Congratulations to the class of 2020! You made it, and I wish the best for you all!”

Christopher Lomahquahu/GRIN
**Higher Education Graduates**

**Allan Mies**
New Mexico State University
Bachelor’s - Anthropology
I never would have thought three years ago that I would be where I am now, but I’m so glad that I am. I’ve been lucky, but I also know that I’ve worked hard, and that there are few better feelings than turning in work you can be proud of. Every one of us has it in us to make it, you just have to take those steps. I did, and I couldn’t be happier.

**Danielle Allen**
University of Dubuque
Bachelor-Criminal Justice
I want to thank my family for all your support and encouragement these past two years, I could have not done this without you all. My love, you have been my rock and thank you for everything.

**Laiken Molina**
Arizona State University
Bachelor of Arts - Educational Studies
This accomplishment is for my daughter, Lainey, who is my motivation to move forward in all aspects of my life. My family, who have made this accomplishment easier and GRIC Higher Edu. Dept, who have made this opportunity possible.

**Vela Moncada**
Arizona State University-College of Health Solutions
Bachelor’s Exercise Wellness, Minor in Spanish
There were times when I couldn’t see the end. Thank you to my family, friends and mentors for guiding me through this adventure. Por ustedes Y para ustedes! Viva la mujerque lucha!

**Los Angeles Indian Nations University**

**Bianca Marissa Hernandez**
Graduated from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke with a Bachelors degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance, cum Laude. She will be attending graduate school at UNC-Pembroke studying Healthcare Administration.

**Nicholas Osife**
California State University, Long Beach
Master of Science - Applied Statistics
I grew up in District 5 with my grandparents, Dana Osife Jr. and the late Sharon Osife. This accomplishment is a result of their love, encouragement, and constant indulgence of my curiosities. Special thanks to my many mentors who pushed me forward at different stages of my life. John and Tanya Duck, Toni Osife, Denise Osife, Paula Osife, Richard Vance, Peggy Marcoline, and Dr. Russell Benford.

**Rheanna Melissa Jackson**
Feather River College
Associate of Science - Health & Exercise Sciences
Plans to attend Grand Canyon University

**Cassandra Peña**
Arizona State University
Master of Social Work - Social Work (Policy, Administration, and Community Practice)
I’m forever grateful for the support from GRIC, the Tribal Education Department, and my family. My college experience has been life changing and I couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you!!

**Monica Romero-Garcia**
Ottawa University
Master’s Degree-Masters in Education for School Counseling
I am the mother of three hand-some boys, a wife & was a full-time student. I finished for my family. I am now blessed to be working in my dream position as a school counselor. Working in my community, advocating for my Community & giving back to our Community and students.

**Heriberto Linares**
Scottsdale Community College
Associate of Arts
Motion Picture, Television and New Media Productions
Life is like a camera, focus on what’s important, capture the good times, develop from the negative, and if things don’t work out, take another shot.

**Monica Moreno**
Scottsdale Community College
Bachelor of Arts - Anthropology
I want to thank my family, friends, advisors, the Smith family, Coach Al Gipp, the Cross Country/Track & Field Team, The Brotherhood of Phi Sigma Nu, the GRIC Higher Ed Department and many others for their support in helping me obtain my degree(s) at Haskell Indian Nations University. Onward Haskell!

**Shoshone Hayes**
Arizona State University
Bachelor - Applied Biological Sciences
Due to many adversities, I didn’t follow the traditional 4 year schedule. What kept me going was “your journey is not their journey.” This last year I conquered my goal while being pregnant with my first child. Zion Lennox Geyer was born on 5/20/2020 days after graduating. I am overjoyed by both obtaining my bachelors degree in Applied Biological Sciences and starting this new chapter as a mother.

**Pascale Moncada**
Haskell Indian Nations University
Bachelors of Science in Business Administration
I want to thank my family, friends, advisors, the Smith family, Coach Al Gipp, the Cross Country/Track & Field Team, The Brotherhood of Phi Sigma Nu, the GRIC Higher Ed Department and many others for their support in helping me obtain my degree(s) at Haskell Indian Nations University. Onward Haskell!

**Shany Ghanim**
Arizona State University-College of Health Solutions
Bachelor’s Exercise Wellness, Minor in Spanish
There were times when I couldn’t see the end. Thank you to my family, friends and mentors for guiding me through this adventure. Por ustedes Y para ustedes! Viva la mujerque lucha!

**Catherine D. Williamson**
Arizona State University
Master’s - American Indian Studies: Indigenous Rights and Social Justice
I would like to thank my Community for the support to pursue my dream of obtaining my Master’s Degree. I would like to thank my family and friends for their support.

**Aveda Institute Phoenix**

**Yvonne Garcia**
Scottsdale Community College
Associate of Arts
Motion Picture, Television and New Media Productions
Life is like a camera, focus on what’s important, capture the good times, develop from the negative, and if things don’t work out, take another shot.
High School Graduates

Alette Paul
Coolidge High School

Annalisa Elsey Singhurst
The Dalles High School
Anna will be pursuing a degree in Nursing at Columbia Gorge Community College.

Carlos Verdugo
Cesar Chavez High School

Emil A. Zavala
Casa Grande Union High School
I graduated in mid-term of December with a grade point average of 3.56 and had 22.6 credits. I have a disability of Autism. I was challenged and even proceeded my disability and I’m planning to continue my career in cooking and whatever I chose to do with my life.

Joseph H. Cooper III
Coolidge High School
We are so proud of you! This only closes one chapter in your life, there are many more to come. We know you will accomplish all the goals you have set out for yourself. Remember we will always be here for you and WE LOVE YOU. -Mom and Dad

Antonio Garcia
Casa Grande Union High School
Parent or Graduate Comment: Words can’t express how very proud I am of you son. You lead as a great example for your son. You are one in a million my boy. Continue to strive for the very best. I love you with everything in me.

Joylyn A. Dawahoya
Coolidge Alternative Program
Through life’s struggles you overcame and made us proud of you. I can see your dad’s big proud smile. We Love you Joy! Congratulations & God Bless You!

Anjelo Ortiz
RISE Learning Academy
Congratulations Anjelo! We’re all super proud of you and look forward to what comes next for you!

Angelina Camacho
Our daughter is graduating from her school Girls leadership of Arizona with all A’s. She was a shy girl and with every year she has opened up and grown so much. With everything going on in the world and her fellow high schoolers missed out on all the senior activities. So any little thing I can do to show her she is and has done a good thing making it threw school. I will do what I can as a mother to let her know she is an awesome young lady. Her father and I and all our family are very proud of her. We love you so much and want the best for your future.

Cameron Andrew
Casa Grande Union High School

Jeremy Ramirez
Casa Grande Union High School

Gabriella Hart
Coolidge High School
I am proud of Gabriella for pushing through and graduating. I am proud of the leadership she is showing in the Community to other GRIC students. I am excited to see where she will go next. She has the best heart and I know she will do great things.

Jeanine Lopez
Vista Grande High School

Jay’Lynn Griffin
Jay’Lynn plans to attend Palm Beach State College and then off to Florida International University where he plans to pursue a degree in Computer & Game Programming.

Joseph H. Cooper III
Coolidge High School
We are so proud of you! This only closes one chapter in your life, there are many more to come. We know you will accomplish all the goals you have set out for yourself. Remember we will always be here for you and WE LOVE YOU. -Mom and Dad

Jordan Apkaw
Casa Grande Union High School
Plans to attend Northwest Indian College
Thank you to my family, friends and coaches without all of you I wouldn’t be where I am today. #oodhamstrong

Joshua Salazar
Miyamura High School
Plans to attend Grand Canyon University
Joshua graduates with a 4.0 GPA and High Honor recipient. The Rotary Club Senior of the Year for Miyamura High School. He is also the New Mexico State YoYo Champion and ranked 10 in Arizona State yo yo contest. 3rd place skills USA: Carpentry

Joylyn A. Dawahoya
Coolidge Alternative Program
Congratulations & God Bless You!

Anjelo Ortiz
RISE Learning Academy
Congratulations Anjelo! We’re all super proud of you and look forward to what comes next for you!

Emil A. Zavala
Casa Grande Union High School
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Judis Acunia
Cesar Chavez High School
I’m so proud of you and I love you so much. Don’t forget I’ll always be here for you. - Love, Mom

Angelina Camacho
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High School Graduates

Julian Young
James Bowie High School, Arlington TX
Bachelor Degree, Communications

Kaylyn Elouisie Escalante
Coolidge High School
Congratulations to you! Our strong, powerful, smart, hard-working daughter. We are so proud of you. YOU DID IT! Continue to strive, work hard and succeed in everything that you do. WE LOVE YOU! Continued Blessings! Our Cakes, love Your Mom (Carolyn), Step-Dad (Danny), Grandma Connie, Your sister Karissa, Your brothers (Shesquall, Clay, Antonio, Nickolas, Isaac, Caleb) and Family!

Lucille Rhodes
Lucille Rhodes and she is graduating from Primavera. She is currently attending CAIVT where she is studying to become a medical assistant. Unfortunately Lucille was diagnosed with a medical condition her sophomore year yet she never gave up. I am so proud of her for never giving up.

Sadie Notah
Casteel High School and East Valley Institute of Technology Program: Physical Therapy Tech School Continuing: Chandler Gilbert Community College

Malachi Siquieros
Dr. Camille Casteel High School
Plans to attend Northern University - Malachi, continue to chase your goals and fulfill your dreams! You will always have the love and support of your family in everything you do. We are very proud of you! GO JACKS!!

Makayla Lemaster
Walsa Grande High School

Nizhoni M. Begay
Benjamin Franklin High School
Plans to attend Los Angeles Community College
I would like to thank my mom Melissa for making sure I’m on track with everything; homework grades and credits just to be sure I graduate. Also want to thank my grandmother Omerline for giving me advice and helping on my college applications and the real world. I’m proud of myself for making my family proud and having goals in life! Love ya guys!

N.B. Johnson
Casa Grande Union High School

Ovidio Gonzales
Casa Grande Union High School
Son we are so proud of you for making it to this part of your life. I remember the first day of your kindergarten school walking you towards your first class and IT! Look at you all grown up and ready to graduate congratulations your dad and I are so proud of you! You’re such an amazing son keep up the good work and never give up on your dreams! We love you so much congratulations Son.

Mira Jose
Florence High School
To my beautiful A.S Tash-Ha-durg. Congratulations on all your achievements that you have put yourself through. Grandma, Grandpa, your uncles as well as Dad, Mom, Brothers and Baby Sister are all very proud of you. Keep reaching for your dreams and do not let anyone get in your way. With much love from the Jose-Allen Family.

Philip Johns
Casa Grande Union High School
My name is Philip Johns and I am from D4 and my parents are Ruben Johns and April Miles and after graduation I plan on going to college and play basketball or enter the workforce. I want to thank my mom for believing in everything that I do and always pushing me keeping going to school.

ReddiSun Mack
Florence High School
To my Son, you did it! Congratulations on your achievement. We are so proud of you. Now, you have put yourself in a position to go on to the next accomplishment in life, whatever it may be. You have it in you to reach for the stars. With much Love. From Jose-Allen Family

Shayna E. Antone
Coolidge Alternative School
Our family is very proud of Shayna! She is planning to continue her education to become an aesthetic nurse.

Susanna Osife
Casa Grande Union High School
Our Beautiful daughter Trinity was Jr. Miss Gila River for the school year 2019/2020 while she was also a senior at Coolidge High School. Susanna maintained an average GPA of 3.5 and had a 98% attendance rating. Susanna was involved in her school tribes club for all 4 years of high school and she played both basketball and volleyball for Coolidge High School. Susanna has also won several awards such as the YES to LIFE program, Coolidge High School Student Character award, 1st place for artwork in the Tribal Education 2020 Mul-Chu-Tha Art and Essay Contest and best essay for GRICUA’s Washington Youth Tour. Susanna takes pride in her culture and continues to participate in traditional dancing. Susanna plans to go on to college and become a nurse.

Trista Sadie Lucia Pedro
Casa Grande Union High School
Congratulations to our beautiful daughter Trista! We are so proud of you! Continuing on to New York University, Vancouver Campus

Tristan Natani
Casa Grande Union High School
To our son Tristan, follow your passion, stay true to yourself, take pride in how far you’ve come and have faith in how far you will go. We are very proud of you. Congratulations!!

Tyler Namoki
Casa Grande Union High School

TLA Gail Dillon
Casa Grande Union High School
“Climb the mountain so you can see the world. Not so the world can see you!” Continuing on to New York University, Shenkai Campus

Sebastian Manuel
Casa Grande Union High School
We are extremely proud of you Sebastian. We wish you nothing but the best in your future. We love you.

Savannah Dora Dixon
Casa Grande Union High School

Ty Nockade Murphy
Gilbert High School
We are so very proud of you! Love, Mom and Dad and Family
Jr. High Promotions

Alyssa Allison
Coolidge Junior High

Christopher Pino
Smith Jr. High School
Christopher, you did an amazing job this school year. I am so very proud of you! Always continue to do your best and work hard. I am always here to help you. We love you!

Clarice Marie Johnson
Madison #1 Middle School
Clarice amazes me as she continues to grow into a beautiful young lady. Clarice playing in the school orchestra led her to the Harmony Project. She’s played in front of audiences at the Tempe Center for the Arts and ASU School of Music. Clarice has been able to maintain a rigorous rehearsal schedule, grades, softball, volunteer and still be engulfed in K-Pop. Clarice’s music brings such happiness.

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Gabriel Lewis
imagine Prep-Coolidge
We’re proud of you!

Rachel Stephen
Payne Junior High School
Congratulations from your family.

Dayna Da’Shar Sharp
Coolidge Jr. High School
You’re a very bright young lady, you know what you want in life. You set very high standards to complete your goals. We will always be here to support you. Congratulations from your family & friends.

Gabi Nankinga
Imagine Prep Coolidge
Reach for the stars, don’t settle for less. Because you deserve true happiness, you were born to be special, one of a kind with a beautiful soul and a beautiful mind. Making your way with your own ideas, you’ve kept your spirit throughout the years. you’re kind, loving, funny and true. Which is why, son there’s nobody quite like you. Congratulations son we are so PROUD OF YOU.

Love, Mom, Hailey and family

Gilberto J. Villareal Jr.
Coolidge Junior High School
To my 8th grade graduate, We are so proud of what you accomplished so far. The next 4 years you will face many challenges, just remember to believe in yourself as we believe in you and will always be proud of you and with many more accomplishments to come. Congratulations! Love, Mom, Dad and all your family.

Elisa Michael Smith
Coolidge Jr. High School
Congratulations to my son. We are so proud of you. Love you, mom, Chante, Kids, Granny & the gang.

Hailey K. Allison
Coolidge Junior High School
As a family we want to say we are so proud of you, love you more than you know. We know this year had its share of ups and downs but you stayed strong and got it done. Congratulations baby. Love Mom, Jerrod, Ky, Niko, Bella, Vincent, Nana, Tata, Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle.

Gabriel Roy Coppedge
Pueblo Middle School
We are so proud of the good person you are and the young man you’ve become. Don’t forget to try new things, be open to new adventures, and continue to do good. Always know as things get harder I’m always here and all of your family supports you. You have so many people that love you. Happy 8th grade graduation. Love, mom #mama’sboys

Kaydence Rain Apkaw
Villa Gila Middle School
High school here I come!

Jazmyn Norris-Burnett
Imagine Prep Coolidge
Picture was taken at promotion dinner with her Grandma sitting next to her and Great Grandma who just turned 96, along with her Grandfather who is 94. They are proud to have lived so long to watch her grow.

Jerry Pedro Jr.
Sacaton Middle School
Our son has done an amazing job while in school at Sacaton Middle School. Even though he had challenges. He continued to overcome them and get the task done at hand with the help of his teachers and support from family. We believe he finished his schooling strong. We are very proud of you! From your family with love.

Marcel D. Zavala
Sacaton Middle School
I am Autistic but I overcame that and I finished with high honor of my class. If I can do it even though I’m disabled, anyone can do it, too!

Matthew A. Rodriguez
Sacaton Middle School
I am Autistic but I overcame that and I finished with high honor of my class. If I can do it, even though I’m disabled, anyone can do it, too!

Madison Ruvalcaba
Skyline Gila River
“I say this because I know what I am planning for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.” – Jeremiah 29:11

Mammas, I know this year didn’t go as planned but we want you to know we are all very proud of you. You amaze us every day and we are all beside you in everything you do. Your future is just beginning so, let’s do this!! High School Bound!! Love always, your family.

Luna Harrison
New Horizon Choice Program

Evan Namingha
Imagine Prep Coolidge

Manuel Casey Murillo IV
Western Valley Middle School
We are so very proud of our son who has always put forth 100% effort in all his studies throughout his schooling which began in pre-school. We have always stressed the importance of perfect attendance, and to always put forth his very best effort in everything he does. Our son continues to amaze us!

Martha J. Wysocki
Western Valley Middle School
I am so proud of you for your accomplishments, and for being a very kind and thoughtful son. We love you.

Matthew A. Rodriguez
Sacaton Middle School
I am Autistic but I overcame that and I finished with high honor of my class. If I can do it even though I’m disabled, anyone can do it, too!

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Jr. High Promotions

Mireya “Momo” Piedra
Mireya “Momo” Piedra is promoting to high school from Villago Middle School. She promotes with honors. She will be attending Casa Grande Union High School.

Princess Trujillo
Coolidge Jr. High
All your family is very proud of you!

Ruby Laws-Albano
Ruby Laws-Albano who has been promoted from 8th grade to high school. She plays all school sports and club softball. She’s a hard working student athlete who keep her goa high. She has been attending early identification softball camps with Mike Candrea of UOfA softball. Her dream is to play on his team and attend college at UOIA.

Skya J. Donahue
Gila Crossing Community School
We know you could do it! Uni-com Tingz... Keep doing you! We love you so much, the crazy ones you call family.

Patrice Nasewytwu
Vista del Sur Accelerated Academy
Congratulations, Patrice! This is the beginning of the next step in your education. We know you will continue to do a great job. We are very proud of you.

Saniah Elaine Mercado
Dos Rios Elementary
Congratulations to our beloved angel! Saniah! We are so proud of you! May all your future endeavors behond your destined pathway to achieving success. Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Serena Lomakwowa
Villago Middle School
Serena best of luck to you, on to High School now. We all are beyond proud of you Serena! have fun and enjoy High School!!! keep up them grades kid.

Aziah Morris
Early Education Child Care Academy
Way to go! We are very proud of you. Continue to strive for the best, we are here to support you and guide you to a brighter path of education. You are the future!! Love always, your Morris Family.

Audryona Gibson
Gila Crossing Community School
Thanks to Ms. A and Mrs. Alicia for being the best teachers and teaching my daughter.

Aubrielle Bojorquez
Sacaton Headstart
We are all so very proud of you Aubrie! You’re growing up so fast and will soon be in Kindergarten and going to school with sister. I can’t thank God enough for blessing us with you. Your such an awesome smart, kind, loving and tough little girl. We will all continue to be here for you and support you in life. With love, Mom, Dad, Sister, Grandma Morning, Uncle Bee, Auntie Eriss, Alex, Jalen and Blake.

Chad L. Kisto
Casa Blanca Community School
congrats to the Class of 2020!

Ellie Valencia
Vah-Ki Head Start

Lil’ Grads

Alanzo Carmen
Vah-Ki Head Start

Patrice Nasewytewa
Vista del Sur Accelerated Academy
Congratulations, Patrice! This is the beginning of the next step in your education. We know you will continue to do a great job. We are very proud of you.

Francisco Kisto
Vah-Ki Head Start

Chad L. Kisto
Casa Blanca Community School

Ellie Valencia
Vah-Ki Head Start

Aziah Morris
Early Education Child Care Academy
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Casa Blanca Community School

Ellie Valencia
Vah-Ki Head Start

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Lil’ Grads

Henry Porter
Sacaton Head Start
The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go. –Dr. Seuss

Kaneda Murphy
Sacaton Head Start
You’re off to great places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, so... get on your way! –Dr. Seuss

Selena Sky Velarde Allison
Sacaton Elementary School
Your father, siblings and I are so very proud of you our Selena Sky! Continue to be that positive, smart, beautiful, shining light! We love you to no end! Your Family

Mariano J. Conde
Vah-Ki Head Start
Continue to reach for the stars, Mariano

Rayland R. Colt
Gila Crossing Community School
We are so proud of you! You did it! First Grade here we come!

Jennifer Blackwater
Gila Crossing Community School
This is only the start, know your family is always here for you. We love you Minnie.

Emma Hughes
Gila River Indian News

Sackaton School District works through pandemic for successful year

Emma Hughes
Gila River Indian News
This academic school year has experienced many changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After many schools began closing for health and safety, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey and Arizona Superintendent Kathy Hoffman announced in March that schools would be closed for the remainder of the academic school year.

With schools closing for the health and safety of everyone, many have had to adjust to sudden changes in continuing providing education. Working closely with Community representative’s schools created a COVID-19 preparedness plan.

Sackaton School District was on spring break when school closures for the state were announced. “Our number one priority is the safety of our students and our staff to be in service to the Community,” said Cheryl Paul, Sacaton School District Superinten-dent. The school provided two pathways for students to continue learning from home. Pre-school and Kindergarten students received Chromebooks for online learning through Google classrooms and Zoom instructional video meetings and learning packets were distributed.

Sackaton School District has also been providing meals in the Community. Sacaton School District has provided over 47,000 meals, offered curbside or drop off at designated locations. Gila Crossing Community School has also provided around 70,000 meals to students and families in the Community. Both schools will continue to provide meals throughout the summer.

While returning to school will be different, all schools are preparing to return in August. Taking safety measures and adhering to CDC recommendations with hand sanitizers being installed, more thorough cleaning of classrooms and campuses, face masks, temperature checks, and even classroom adjustments for physical distancing.

Sackaton Middle School Promotion
Like many schools in the Community have finished their school year and have found new ways to celebrate the accomplishments of students.

Sackaton Middle School celebrated 50 students with a parade. On March 20, promoting eight graders rode along Bluebird Road as family, friends, teachers and staff parked on the side applauded them. To celebrate the achievement, students received their certificate of promotion, a “swag bag” filled with school supplies, dinner and a yard sign with their picture on it for the family. The promotion was broadcasted live on Gila River Broadcasting Corp.

Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis also joined the parade, “Attending graduations and grade promotions of our Gila River students is one of the most rewarding events I get to participate in as your governor,” said Gov. Lewis to the Sacaton Braves of 2020.

Superintendent Paul has said it was the most memorable event because of all the heartfelt support from the Community to celebrate the student’s accomplishment during a time like this.

During the school’s promotion Sacaton Superintendent, Cheryl Paul introduced Sacaton Middle School’s new principal, Cindy Lewis whose education career spans 20 years of working with K-12.

FROM THE FRONT PAGE
Christopher Lomahquahu
Gila River Indian News
Nicolas Osife took the time to look back on his education, from leaving the reservation to moving west to obtain two degrees at California State University, Long Beach.

Last December, Osife received his master’s degree in Applied Statistics, which followed a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics and Arts in Mathematical Economics from CSU in 2017.

“Currently, I work as an Insurance Adjuster for Kemper Insurance Corporation,” said Osife. He continues to study statistics on his spare time, which influenced him to pursue a graduate degree in statistics.

Osife added that he wanted to drop out of college, and as a new student the amount of work can be daunting, but taking things slow helped with his transition through school.

“Over the last eight years, when fear held me back, those words pushed me forward. If you want to be a college graduate, it only takes one imperfect assignment at a time,” said Osife.

Osife acknowledged his many mentors who pushed him forward at different stages of his life including John and Tanya Duck, Toni Osife, Denise Osife, Paula Osife, Richard Vance, Peggy Marcoline, and Dr. Russell Benford.

It was fun in the summertime at Vah-Ki Head Start’s drive-thru promotion

Kyle Knox
Gila River Indian News
Vah-Ki Head Start honored their students who completed a successful 2019-2020 year on Friday, June 12, with a drive-thru promotion at the District 5 Multipurpose Building. Community departments and programs lined the parking lot with vehicles adorned with a summertime beach theme giving out incentives and gifts.

Dorrian Pahona, Vah-Ki Head Start Family Service Advocate, helped coordinate the drive-thru promotion for the students. Pahona said, “We really missed our kids and wanted to bring them out for something different. After seeing how other drive-thru promotions were held, we felt we could offer the same for kids.”

Pahona mentioned that 37 students that attended Vah-Ki, 32 students participated in the promotion, and 20 of those will be promoted to Kindergarten next year. Ms. Angie was the teacher for the Head Start students, and Ms. Neva, Ms. Veronics, and Ms. Coree were the instructors for the Pre-K students. All teachers and staff were in attendance to deliver certificates and gifts.

Starting at 5:30 p.m., families entered the parking lot in 15-minute increments based on student names. Winding around the lot, families received goodie bags, backpacks, treats, and face masks from the school administration. Students were met by their teachers who gave them their certificates, unique gifts, and a polaroid with their teachers to take home at the end of the route.

Ms. Neva, the pre-school teacher, was excited to see her students at the promotion. Neva felt that this event was necessary because, “We have a connection with the children and families and want to show support for them during this time of COVID and want to feel supported aside from homework packets and food delivery.”

Students appeared happy to see their teachers, bus drivers, and school staff for the occasion. The drive-thru style is just one of many new and innovative ways to celebrate students’ accomplishments across the Community. And before the drive-thru in May, the Vah-Ki Head Start held a parade where they drove by their students’ homes and cheered them on as a means of keeping in touch.

Ms. Coree, Head Start teacher aide, said the parade and promotion are essential because “we’re trying to help make things as normal as possible, at the moment, and for them to know they are important.”
High School Graduates

Joseph Cooper III, Coolidge High School
Amaya Duran, Coolidge High School
Kaylyn Escalante, Coolidge High School
Gabriella Hart, Coolidge High School
Antonio Manuel, Coolidge High School
Xavier Martinez, Coolidge High School
Sonja Mendoza, Coolidge High School
Gabriella Ordona, Coolidge High School
Owen Osife, Coolidge High School
Susanna Osife, Coolidge High School
Alette Paul, Coolidge High School
Kristopher Perkins, Coolidge High School
Malachi Allen, Hamilton High School
Samantha Munoz, Hamilton High School
David Raums, Hamilton High School
Kode Joaquin, Hamilton High School
Jazmynne Terry, Hamilton High School
Monique Makil, ICAN/Basha High School
Erlin Allison, ICAN/Basha High School
Macao Lewis, ICAN/Hamilton
Michaela Dixon, Basha High School
Patricia Stewart, Basha High School
Maxwell Xavier, Basha High School
Sadie Notah, Camille Casteel High School
Malachi Siquieros, Camille Casteel High School
Aram Coleman, Chandler High School
Gabrielle Francisco, Chandler High School
Angelo Mendoza Jr., Chandler High School
Ana Alicia Pablos, Chandler High School
Jasmine Ramos, Chandler High School
Dominick Johnson, CAP
Kevin Pino, CAP
Shayna Antoine, CAP
Dedric Osife, CAP
Dinah Lewis, CAP
Adam Gonzales, CAP
Alicia Pedro, Casa Grande Union High School
Helen Whitman, Casa Grande Union High School
Allen Pratt, Casa Grande Union High School
Jeremy Ramirez, Casa Grande Union High School
Allitia Ramon, Casa Grande Union High School
Adrianna Santos, Casa Grande Union High School
Jacob Stone, Casa Grande Union High School
Emil Zavala, Casa Grande Union High School
Larry Carr, Vista Grande High School
Makayla Lemaster, Vista Grande High School
Jeanine Lopez, Vista Grande High School
Nicoleah Morgan, Vista Grande High School
Karissa Ortega, Vista Grande High School
Julian Sanchez, Casa Grande Union High School
Dominique Sims, Casa Grande Union High School
Zachary Lewis, Casa Grande Union High School
Phillip Johns, Casa Grande Union High School
Sydney Johns, Casa Grande Union High School
Sebastian Manuel, Casa Grande Union High School
Tristan Natani, Casa Grande Union High School
Karissa Ortega, Vista Grande High School
Julian Sanchez, Casa Grande Union High School
Dominique Sims, Casa Grande Union High School
Zachary Lewis, Casa Grande Union High School
Phillip Johns, Casa Grande Union High School
Sydney Johns, Casa Grande Union High School
Sebastian Manuel, Casa Grande Union High School
Tristan Natani, Casa Grande Union High School
Tyler Namoki, Casa Grande Union High School
Jordyn Apkak, Casa Grande High School
DeIray Baptisto, Casa Grande High School
Emilee Baptisto, Casa Grande High School
Verlen Belgardo, Casa Grande High School
Elyasia Colt, Casa Grande High School
Marissa Copperfield, Casa Grande High School
Savannah Dixon, Casa Grande High School
Isahau Francisco, Casa Grande High School
Antonio Garcia, Casa Grande High School
Ovidio Gonzalez Jr., Casa Grande High School
Trista Pedro, Casa Grande High School
James Matthews, Casa Grande High School
Sabrina Marrietta, Chemawa Indian School
Kassandra French, Chemawa Indian School
Victoria Lewis, Chemawa Indian School
Reina Jackson, Chemawa Indian School
Erica Lopez, Chemawa Indian School
Alonzo Lopez, Chemawa Indian School
Lydia Antoine, Chemawa Indian School
Johnathan Soka, Chemawa Indian School
Erika Guzman, Chemawa Indian School
Jayden Smalcanyon, Chemawa Indian School
Elena Kisto, Riverside Indian School
Nathan Norris, Riverside Indian School
Caitlin Avila, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Tavy Dillon, Betty H. Fairfax High School
David Hernandez, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Kalussa Jojannah, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Tommy Knox, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Elwin Terrazas, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Rachael Whempney, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Roslyn Fahrenkamk, Betty H. Fairfax High School
Sarai Ortiz, Desert Vista High School
Deja Bustalla, Desert Vista High School
Ashley Johnson, Desert Vista High School
Blanca Miranda, Tempe High School
Daniel Eno, Tempe High School
Cameron Andrew, Mountain Pointe High School
Harley Williams, Campo Verde High School
Judis Lee Acunia, Cesar Chavez High School
Ky Helen Allison, Cesar Chavez High School
Priscilla Bilagody, Cesar Chavez High School
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Carlos Verdugo, Cesar Chavez High School
Raman Palma, Cesar Chavez High School
Joshua Lamas-Esno, Cesar Chavez High School
Loukas Brown, Desert Hills High School
James Forsena, Quest High School
Christian Rodriguez, Apollo High School
Chauncey Jackson, Window Rock High School
Angelina Camacho, Girls Leadership of Arizona
Alisa Belgarde, Skyline Gila River
Amairon Valtierra, Career Success High School
Angelica Ulate, Skyline Gila River
Annette Hooke, Skyline Gila River
Arrosha Kelley, Skyline Gila River
Chauncey Jackson, Window Rock High School
Christian X Rodriguez, Apollo High School
Claudia Acevedo, Leading Edge Academy
Darin Young, Lewisville High School
David Young, Lewisville High School
Deja Johns, South Mountain High School
Harley Williams, Compadre Academy
Hope Miles, Skyline Gila River
Isabelle Johns, AZ Compass Prep
James Pereana, Quest High School
Janel Lewis, Penn Foster High School Online
Jonathan Manuel Jr., Student Choice
Julian Young, James Bowie High School
Kasean Mahan, AZ Compass Prep
Katie Jose, Skyline Gila River
Louvjas Brown, Desert Hills High School
Lucille Rhodes, Pomona High School
Marielena Casarez, Skyline Gila River
McKenna Joyce White, Lawrence High School
Mish Gregg, Skyline Gila River
Mira Jose, Florence High School
Nizhoni Begay, Benjamin Franklin Senior High
Parnell Lewis Jr., Skyline Gila River
Reddison Mack, Florence High School
Sequoya Lucero, Skyline Gila River
Ty Murphy, Gilbert High School
Yvette Hernandez, Skyline Gila River
Zaylen Joe, Skyline Gila River
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The class of 2020 met unprecedented challenges to complete the academic year. In the face of so much change and adversity, they still prevailed. With the closure of schools and public health concerns, they boldly continued with their school work and programs to show the world that they are truly GILARIVERSTRONG. The class of 2020 represents a high-point in a year filled with so much strain and difficulty. Our students stuck to their goals and adjusted to earn their promotions, diplomas and degrees. This year is historic in many ways, but it is also unparalleled in the pride that I have for all those who achieved their dreams during these tumultuous times. From home-schooling, to social distancing, and top-to-bottom changes to our tribal government, we stand before a group of individuals who showed us the real meaning of strength and determination.

I've often said that the future is in the hands of our youth and our graduates. Although that future may seem uncertain at times, I am more confident than ever that the class of 2020 is destined to play a big role in the prosperity of the Gila River Indian Community. They will use their minds, they will use their hearts, and they will use their inner-spirits to guide them as they have guided us this year.

Traditional pomp and circumstance was replaced with creative and unique ways to recognize our students. Although ceremonies were postponed, delayed or significantly modified, we will always remember this class for the way they carried themselves and represented our Community.

This is also a time to celebrate our Tribal Education Department, educators and school staff who likewise persevered to give these students a meaningful school year. This year would be much different had it not been for their cooperation and resourcefulness. The classrooms may have been empty, but they still found ways to fill eager young minds with valuable lessons.

No message of gratitude would be complete without mentioning the families that are also included in the class of 2020. Your example brought out the best in these students. From Pre-K and Kindergarten, middle school, high school, college and beyond, they looked to you for direction and you delivered. Your assistance deserves its own cap and gown, but as a parent, I know your only reward is seeing your children happy.

So once again, to this exceptional class, we are extremely proud of you and hopeful for the things you will accomplish in the coming years. Remember this feeling, get used to it, because success will follow you if you work hard and never stop learning. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2020!

"Putting Our People First"
Stephen Roe Lewis
Governor, Gila River Indian Community

CLASS of 2020
#GilaRiverStrong