

HARTFORD HIGH SCHOOL



Annabelle Payton/The Republican

A plane performs a flyover as part of Hartford High School commencement exercises.



The Hartford High School Class of 2020.



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The Hartford football field scoreboard lit up with 20's in honor of the Class of 2020.

Graduates share memories, ponder difficulties and lessons learned

Katie McMurray  
Reporter

HARTFORD — Overcoming but still acknowledging the coronavirus pandemic with social distancing, Hartford High School held commencement exercises for its 15-member Class of 2020 at the Hartford High School football field Saturday, May 20. Fourteen of the 15 seniors were able to attend the ceremony.

The graduates processed onto the field to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance," and senior class president Schyler Schmidt welcomed everyone to the commencement ceremony and thanked family, friends, faculty, staff, administration and community members for sharing the special moment with the graduates.

"I am thankful we are able to celebrate today with those we cherish and love even under the crazy circumstances life has thrown at us over the past few months," Schmidt said. "The Class of 2020 has had its fair share of difficulties but even better successes and victories. We look forward to celebrating those moments with you today."

Principal Doug Hes presented awards. Presidential Excellence Gold Awards were presented to Dakota Aye and Bailey Darbyshire, and a Presidential Excellence Silver Award went to Dalton Landis. KSHSAA Citizenship Awards were presented to Darbyshire and Gabriel Metcalfe. The Heart of the Jaguar Award, a special award created in memory of Teia Payton and presented each year to an individual either from the school or community who exemplifies what it means to be a Jaguar, went to Brandon Sapp.

Two special school traditions were continued. After adding blue and silver ribbon to the school cane, the Class of 2020 officers passed the cane down to the Class of 2021. The class officers then presented



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Guest speaker Mrs. Teresa Wiebe.



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Salutatorian Schyler Schmidt.



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Valedictorian Bailey Darbyshire.



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Sebastian Blankley pumps a fist into the air in excitement that he and his friends and classmates have graduated.



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Recipients of awards presented at Hartford High School's graduation ceremony Saturday, June 20, and their award received are, from left, Dakota Aye, Presidential Excellence Gold Award; Dalton Landis, Presidential Excellence Silver Award; Bailey Darbyshire, Presidential Excellence Gold Award and KSHSAA Citizenship Award; Gabriel Metcalfe, KSHSAA Citizenship Award; and Brandon Sapp, Heart of the Jaguar Award.



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Tyler Skirvin gestures he, and his classmates, are ready to do this graduation, as he participates in the processional with fellow graduate Jackson Vaughn following behind him.

the class composite to Principal Hes.

HHS science teacher Teresa Wiebe, the guest speaker, shared thoughts and memories with the graduates.

"As I pondered over what to say to you seniors, I began to remember our moments together. There are many," Wiebe said. "Mr. Hes and I started at Hartford Jr./

Sr. High the same year you all were freshmen. We were blessed that you were our class. You are a unique group, very, very talented, and I want to thank you for allowing me to speak into your lives and letting me be a part of your adventure these last few years. However, this is not the end of your adventure. Actually, it's just a beginning. A myriad of people have been working to equip you. We've been doing

our best to give you the tools you need to succeed in life." Wiebe went on to share a short special message for each individual graduate, then concluded with some words of encouragement for the class as a whole.

"You, Class of 2020, are my future. You are my hope," Wiebe said. "I am so confident in my future. I know you're going to strive to do bright things and be the excellent

young people I know each and every one of you are. I love you. No one will take your place in my heart. God bless you."

Salutatorian Schyler Schmidt addressed memories and life lessons.

"The last four years at Hartford High School have given us each the opportunity to grow in a positive direction, the ability to make lifelong friends and most importantly memories we will cherish for a lifetime," Schmidt said.

She took a trip down memory lane, sharing some of her favorite memories from junior high and high school, then spoke of lessons learned.

"During our last four years at Hartford High School, I have learned so many lessons not only academically, but important everyday life lessons," Schmidt said. "I have learned it is important to take advantage of new opportunities. Opportunities can be scary and intimidating, however, to achieve anything in life, we must take those chances. If we fail, there are lessons to be learned through those experiences also."

"I have learned that hard work is important inside and outside of the classroom, that our faculty and staff members are some of our biggest fans and that when you have amazing friends in your class, they become more than friends. They become family. There is no doubt, there is not any other class I would have rather been in."

Schmidt also acknowledged many of the people who made graduation possible, including school board members, staff, faculty, Mr. Hes and her family and classmates. She concluded with a piece of advice for her classmates.

"Know that not all opportunities are fun or easy, but take every opportunity you possibly can to help you be the best you there is," Schmidt said.

Valedictorian Bailey Darbyshire opened her remarks with a motto coined by John Ingalls back in 1861.

"He said, 'Ad Astra per Apera,' which means 'To the stars through difficulty,'" Darbyshire said. "I really cannot think of another quote that is more fitting to our class than that one."

To explain why she chose that quote, Darbyshire encouraged her classmates to think about the difficulties they encountered on their journey through elementary school, junior high and high school. She also shared memories of some of the difficulties she remembered well, from a rainy and very wet field day in kindergarten to the present day, where the class is ending a chapter of their lives having had to miss the end of their senior year, and many activities along with it. Darbyshire then expressed the good she could see in it.

"As I look at our class and

look at what we have been through, I know this is nothing for us, because we are resilient," she said. "This isn't a block in our road; this is a speed bump, and we all know how most of us never even slow down for those. Out of all of these situations, we have grown to be stronger, wiser and more courageous. We have learned the traits of empathy, patience and versatility. We now know not to take anything for granted and to treasure every moment."

Darbyshire then gave some advice and encouragement to her classmates.

"Do not let the difficulties we have passed hold you back, because what happened to us doesn't even compare to what we are going to do in the future," Darbyshire said. "The future success of this class will be greater than the difficulties we have had to face. I believe in us, as you should believe in yourself, as well. Whatever adventure you choose to go on next, make sure it's the one you want, so that many years down the road, when you tell your grandchildren about how insane 2020 was, how Corona was crazy, how you were faced with a difficulty, you can also tell them you pushed through and got to your goals anyway."

Darbyshire concluded, "I hope now and in the future, when a difficulty arises, that you don't let it stop you. Instead, choose to shoot for the stars, because we all are capable of anything and everything."

Hes presented the Class of 2020. Kira Westhoff and alumni led the singing of the school alma mater. Board of Education member Emily Darbyshire presented the Class of 2020 with their diplomas to conclude the ceremony.

The 15 members of the Hartford High School Class of 2020 are Dakota Aye, Sebastian Blankley, Bailey Darbyshire, Jade Jackson, Dalton Landis, Xavier McDiffett, Gabriel Metcalfe, Whitney Pearson, Brandon Sapp, Schyler Schmidt, Tyler Skirvin, Allison Stithem, Cody Thomas, Lindsay Torrens and Jackson Vaughn.

Kansas State Scholar Curriculum Completers were Aye and Darbyshire.

National Honor Society members were Aye and Darbyshire.

Flint Hills Technical College Certificate completers were Blankley and Jackson.

Class officers are Schmidt, president; Lindsay Torrens, vice president; Tyler Skirvin, secretary; and Gabriel Metcalfe, treasurer. The class colors are blue and silver, flower is the sunflower, song is "My Wish" by Rascal Flatts and motto is "Dream the impossible. Seek the unknown. Achieve greatness." The source of the motto is unknown.

HARTFORD GRADUATION PARADE



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A parade was held for Hartford High School graduates following commencement exercises Saturday, June 20. Above, the Neosho Rapids Fire Department led the parade, which included a vehicle for each graduate.



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Class of 2020 member Whitney Pearson shoots confetti into the air in celebration of graduation as she rides in the parade.



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Graduate Allison Stithem, all smiles, shows off her decorated mortarboard during the parade.

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