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GRADS**

CLASS OF 2021

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June 2021

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**JOHNSTON SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL**



JUST DID IT: The view from behind Tori Viau showed off the graduating senior's decorated mortarboard, as her fellow students prepared to walk to the football field for commencement. (Sun Rise photos by Rory Schuler)

'This is your town'

At first outdoor ceremony in years, Johnston High School celebrates class of 2021

By RORY SCHULER

"Life is a hot dog." Audry Mahony, salutatorian of the Johnston High School class of 2021, found secret answers to future questions hidden under a thin cylinder of meat, tucked into a split-top bun.

While working a fast food drive-thru window, the graduating senior started asking her customers a simple, but tasty question.

"Is a hot dog a sandwich?"

"Now I hope a lot of you are thinking, 'Absolutely not!'" Mahony told the crowd gathered for commencement. "However, I get the feeling that most of you are probably thinking, 'What does this have to do with graduation?' Which is also a fair answer, I guess."

Repeatedly during her shifts leading up to Friday's ceremony, Mahony asked this

question of faceless customers, as they shouted orders into a box.

"A few weeks ago, while working at the drive through speaker, I decided to start asking this philosophical hot dog quandary," she said. "After a few seconds of silence, every one of them gave one of three responses."

Mahony said the first and most popular answer was "no, a hot dog is not a sandwich."

Only five times, her customers answered, "yes, a hot dog is a sandwich."

"One woman looked up the definition of a hot dog on her phone, which said that a hot dog is in fact classified as a type of sandwich," Mahony recalled.

There were some strange answers. "One customer said that so is a taco, and in some circumstances, spaghetti and meatballs," Mahony recalled. "I didn't really follow up on that one."

The third answer Mahony received was

a brief "no thank you."

"Which I presume came from people who thought that we were trying to offer them a hot dog," Mahony said. "Which was a little weird considering I work at Starbucks."

Mahony's question was the core of a social experiment.

"The hot dog question really breaks that cycle," she said. "It reminds the customer that fast food workers are not just an appendage of a corporate monolith. It reminded me that those coming through our drive-thru were not just customers with sometimes slightly concerning drink orders, but also individuals with opinions and thoughts to share."

Mahony applied the hot dog hypothesis to her 187 fellow graduating seniors.

"Ask every student graduating today what their high school experience was like, and you'll get 200 different answers," she said. "Life is a hot dog. There is no ob-

jectively correct way to classify your experiences. You can cite a gut feeling to justify your emotions, and nobody can tell you that you're wrong. Because the big secret is, no matter what anyone tells you, nobody really has life figured out."

From frankfurters to the fearful future, Mahony wanted the crowd to learn from her experiment.

"Just never forget, the world is your hot dog," she told the crowd. "Whether or not it's a sandwich is up to you. Face your fears. Talk to and learn from everyone you meet. Challenge the status quo and you can't go wrong."

To laughter, she added: "Unless you think spaghetti and meatballs is a sandwich. In which case, please seek help."

Johnston High School Principal Dr. Donna Pennacchia announced each speaker during the ceremony held Friday night, June 18, at the Mayor Joseph M. Polisena Athletic Complex.



FORWARD TO THE FUTURE: Members of the Class of 2021 lined up from Johnston High School to the entrance of the Joseph M. Polisena Athletic Complex prior to last Friday's commencement ceremony.



CLASS OF '21: Photos of graduates and a sign celebrating the Johnston High School Class of 2021 greeted all who drove into the school's parking lot. (Sun Rise photo by Rory Schuler)

"It has been a very difficult time for me to find the right words to express how proud I am to be the principal for each and every one of you," Pennacchia said. "Under normal circumstances, I would stand before you delivering a more formal speech. But not tonight. This is a celebration."

Nicholas Cronan, president of the senior class, addressed the circumstances under which this year's ceremony was held.

"In these unprecedented times, in these challenging times, in the middle of a pandemic – these are the words I think we can all collectively agree we never wish to hear in our lifetimes again," Cronan said. "Often used as a way of introducing a statement or reminder of things we have been unable to do this year, it is of no desire of mine to repeat any message to you like this."

"On a night as long awaited, anticipated and special as this, it is perhaps most appropriate for us to abandon any regrets of the things we have been unable to do, and remember precisely all the good things that brought us together for this moment."

Cronan served as president of the Class of 2021 for the past four years. Last year's class graduated under much stricter pandemic guidelines.

"Being the first outdoor graduation ceremony held by the high school in some years, I am extraordinarily grateful to stand here before all of you, here tonight, in person, one final time as your senior class president, looking out at the many bright smiling faces, that have made our class so respected and loved by many," Cronan said. "Well, I can now officially say that after a 12-year ride, we finally reached the end of one of the first big adventures of our lives."

Cronan recalled the early days his class shared, from playing with Legos as young children, to their first days at the high school.

"I'm not really sure how it's possible, but one moment we were witnessing the triumph in the tug of war over the seniors at freshmen year's battle of the classes," he said. "And one moment, we blinked an eye and now we've somehow grown to become those very seniors that looked so high and mighty to us. Through thick and thin, we've all become a true family."

The members of the graduating class were shaped by the world around them.

"I truly believe that given many of the challenges we faced, our class has evidently become defined by its unmatched resilience and unceasing desire to suc-

ceed," Cronan said. "Just because we are graduating does not mean the magic we created together has disappeared. Do not give up hope for the future, just because this recent year may not have been as perfect as we all hoped. After all, who wants perfection when you can have magic? Who wants an expected and rigid way of life, when you can have an adventure?"

Johnston Mayor Joseph M. Polisena, for whom the football stadium where the crowd gathered was named, reminded the audience he was born and raised in this small town.

"Some 49 years ago, I was like all of you, the graduates here tonight, a bit nervous, uncertain of what the future would bring," he recalled. "But like all of you, I was prepared because of the solid public education from the Johnston Public Schools system."

Polisena was a member of the class of 1972.

"Each of you will face new and exciting challenges, as you navigate throughout your future," he told the graduates. "In some instances, it won't be easy, but you will succeed. Determination, drive and thirst for knowledge will make you succeed."

He urged the graduates to give back to Johnston following commencement.

"This class of 2021 will have the ability to solve problems, navigate through life's most difficult challenges, overcome adversity and make our community, our world, a better place to live work, and play," Polisena said. "No matter what you decide to do in your future, please remember, this is your town. This is your community. It belongs to all of you. Always look for ways to give back to your community. And remember, when choosing your career, always make sure you love what you do, and always do what you love."

Johnston Schools Superintendent Dr. Bernard DiLullo Jr. stepped to the podium next and addressed the crowd.

"On behalf of the Johnston School Department, I bring you good wishes on your special day," DiLullo said. "This is a major milestone in your life, and one you'll always remember. I'm proud of this class' accomplishments in spite of the many challenges you faced, particularly in the last two years."

DiLullo congratulated the graduating class.

"You've put in extraordinary effort, worked hard, and strived to do your best," he said. "You've met the high standards that faculty and staff have set for you, and that is something to be proud

of. Tonight is both your reward for your diligence, and also the gateway to a successful future."

The next speaker, Louis DiMaio, served as advisor to the class of 2021 for the past four years.

"I'd like to welcome you to the first class reunion," he joked to begin his address. "I know we're a little early for it. It does seem like that, if you really think of it."

He laughingly scolded Cronan for stealing his ideas, but continued anyway.

"I'd like to thank you for your patience, and your understanding, during these past months, and during these past few weeks, as the final plans for this celebration evolved, and clearly shifted, as did much of our social interactions in the world at large, as we emerged from the shadows of the pandemic," DiMaio said. "I hope you give yourselves credit, graduates, for truly the absolute positive stubbornness, with which you refused to be overcome by the challenges of this year. [There] is one thing that you did do that you need to remember ... no one has done what you had to do this year."

Kayla Aquilante earned the title of valedictorian of the Johnston High School class of 2021.

Her first-place class rank came at a high cost, but taught her valuable life lessons.

"I found out that I was in the running for this title in the winter of my sophomore year," Aquilante recalled. "It was then that I decided I wanted it. So, I worked hard for it. I sacrificed and stressed for it; ultimately earning myself this distinction."

Aquilante found out she earned the honor at the school's senior awards ceremony.

"I felt elated when I heard my name announced with this title," she said. "Such euphoria lasted for about 15 seconds; 15 seconds of my heart racing and my adrenaline pumping; 15 seconds of, 'Yeah, I did that.'"

After the initial thrill, a realization settled in.

"But there must come a 16th second," she told the crowd. "And on that 16th second, my smile relaxed and my face returned to its resting state. I took a deep breath and thought to myself, 'That's it? That was the culmination of four years of hard work? Why am I not feeling anything else?' To be honest, I'm not too sure what I was expecting."

Aquilante said she couldn't help feeling a crush of disappointment.

"Perhaps I was hoping all of my problems would fade away," she said. "Un-

fortunately, however, that did not happen. I felt nothing. Not even in my heart. My lack of emotion shocked me, to say the least. This presented a huge problem for me and I needed to figure out why."

Aquilante said she spent a great deal of time exploring the conflicting emotions triggered by the role of valedictorian.

"After much deliberation and thought, I have come to the conclusion that working hard is good, no doubt about it," she said. "But it should not be done ... at the expense of your happiness and the quality of your relationships with others."

At times, she said, the pressures of earning the number one spot were far greater than the ultimate reward.

"As I reflect upon my high school experience, I realize that the tremendous stress that I placed on myself to achieve this goal, and deliver this five minute speech to all of you, was paid for with the lack of nurturing my mental health, building memories with my fellow classmates, and attending to relationships in my life," Aquilante told the crowd. "While I can easily discuss my numerous honors and awards, I would rather bring light to the reality of how I earned them. I certainly spent countless hours devoting myself to my studies."

She recalled many dinners eaten alone in her room while studying. She remembered the many invitations she declined, because of pending exams.

She had been "socially isolating" herself, "in order to maintain a perfect academic record," she told the crowd.

"I feel that a lesson learned, should be a lesson shared," Aquilante told the stadium full of family and fellow graduates. "I am glad that I learned this at such a young age. And I cannot imagine if I only understood it at the end of my life."

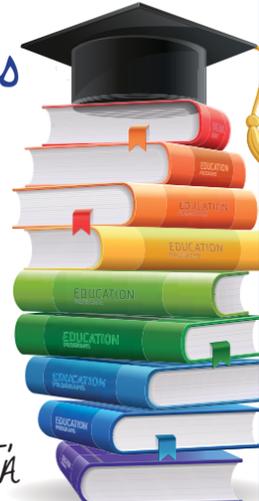
She begged the crowd to learn from her mistakes.

"Here's the lesson," Aquilante said. "Have no regrets in the 16th second. Nothing is more important than your emotional well-being and healthy relationships. Nothing."



Congratulations
Emma Salzillo
 Johnston High School
 Graduate
 Class of 2021

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Scenes from the graduation ceremony



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- INTEREST RATES:** Rates are for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2021 for the 2021/22 academic year and include 0.25% reduction for making automatic monthly payments (auto-pay feature). Each repayment option is subject to funds availability. Funds will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Interest begins accruing after each loan disbursement. The rates and terms disclosed above are available while funds last. New funds may be subject to different rates and/or terms.
- APR:** The Annual Percentage Rate (APR) reflects the total cost of the loan, including origination fees (\$50), accruing interest, and the effect of capitalized interest. Interest begins accruing after each loan disbursement. If monthly payment is calculated to be less than \$50 per month for full term, lowest payment is \$50 per month with term reduced.
- RHODE ISLAND ADVANTAGE** applies to any Rhode Island students attending school in any state or Non-Rhode Island students attending a school in Rhode Island who select an Immediate Repayment loan.







Johnston High School Class of 2021

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Sarah Bandoma
Liliana Bankauskas
Sheher Bano
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Kendall Bernier
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Alisha Biswas
Sebastian Brooks
Evan Buratczuk
Emily Cabrera
Ian Michael Cabrera
Christian Canning
Isabella Carbone
Sophie Cardullo
Nicholas Carlino
John Carreiro
Alexeya Castillo
Alex Cavanaugh
Jaheim Cea
Grace Centracchio
Justin Chacon
Orlando Chavez
Patricia China
Jonas Chuk
Trista Clark
Abigail Clesas
Stefania Cogean

Priscilla Constant
Talia Conti
Grayson Costa
Julia Costa
Jeremy Council
Jessica Council
Jazelyn Couture
Nicholas Cronan
Ramses Cruz
Diana DeCosta
Mark DeCosta
Avah DeOliveira
Isabella DiBiase
Darius DuBois
Angelina Dureault
Isabella Eason
Jose Echeverria
Maxwell El Hage
Dylan Estrada
Gianna Fernandes
Michael Ferreira Jr.
Scott Ferreira
Julianna Ferruccio
Raffaele Florio
Matthew Fortier
Melissa Garofalo
Haley Gaunt
Kebba Gaye
Zoe Georgio
Cody Giroux
David Gravier
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Laila Harrington
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Matthew Hassell
Michael Hassell
Brianna Haynie
Hao He

Jamilyn Holburn
Guillermo Hurtado
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Anthony Lisi
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Oliver Littlefield
Jonatan Lopez
Taina Lopez
Miranda Lumb
Audry Mahony
Jacob Mainey
Gregory Manni
Victoria Marchesi
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Brooke Marcotte
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Bazal Masood
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Jade Penn
Angelina Pennacchia
Nicholas Petrillo
Anthony Petronelli
DeShawn Piersaint
Andres Pineda
Jonathan Pineda
Michelle Pinto
Morgan (Alex) Pouliot
Melanie Privitera
Mariela Quintanilla
Jeseth Quinteros
Brenda Razana Ortiz
Nicholas Reagan
Hannah Reedy
Sean Reth
Madeline Reyes

Rafael Rivera
Brynn Roche
Savanna Rodrigues
Dessence Roman
Kalexia Roper
Heidy Rosa
Kevin Saker
Oseas Salazar
Justin Salvatore
Emma Salzillo
Juan Sandoval
Katelyn Simeone
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Dillon Stubbs
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William Vincent
James Ward
Jawan Yon
Thomas Zednik
Luming Zheng
Caitlynn Zinni

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Way to Go Graduates!

Congratulations Johnston High School Class of 2021

from the Johnston School Committee

District 1 Robert Lafazia	District 2 Dawn Aloisio	District 3 David Santilli	District 4 Joseph Rotella	District 5 Susan Mansolillo
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PAID FOR BY THE JOHNSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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Great Work!

Congratulations to the hardworking students who are celebrating their graduation this year.

We salute your achievement, and are proud of you.

*Congratulations
Johnston High School
Class of 2021*

Mayor Joseph M. Polisena

PAID FOR BY FRIENDS OF MAYOR POLISENA



JHS Seniors cheered at graduation parade

By RORY SCHULER

Dolores and Domenic Centracchio sat in lawn chairs outside Walgreens waiting for the parade to begin.

"We're so proud of Grace," Dolores Centracchio said as she handed her husband a life-size cardboard cutout of her granddaughter's senior photo, mounted on a stick.

The brief sound of sirens blared. The couple stood at attention as emergency vehicles, their lights flashing, crawled up the hill toward their spot.

The Centracchios waited for their granddaughter, Grace, a graduating senior, to appear.

The Johnston High School Class of 2021 rode in a graduation parade on Thursday, June 17.

The graduates met at the North Woods Office Park, and rode north on Atwood Avenue to the Johnston High School parking lot, where an ice cream truck welcomed them with Italian ice and scoops.

Parents, siblings and friends lined the parade route, on both sides of Atwood Avenue.

Susan Perrino, Robert Perrino and Kim Gaunt waited for Haley Gaunt to pass by.

They held signs and cheered at each passing car. Kim Gaunt wanted nothing more than a photo of her daughter in the parade. She shouted down anyone who crossed in front of her camera.

"I was afraid she was coming next," Gaunt explained. She got her shot.

Floats carrying flower-faced panthers traveled the route. Seniors stretched through moon-roofs and perched on the back of convertible back seats.

The parade marked the Class of 2021's last night as seniors. Commencement was planned for the next night. After that, adulthood awaited them all.





Dolores and Domenic Centracchio held cutouts of their granddaughter's senior picture. The couple eagerly awaited the appearance of graduating senior Grace Centracchio during the Johnston High Class of 2021 graduate parade. When they finally spotted the car carrying Grace, they ran to greet it. (Sun Rise photo by Rory Schuler)



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Class of 2021

Rep. Deborah A. Fellela (D)
District 43 - Johnston



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Susan Perrino, Robert Perrino and Kim Gaunt held signs and waited for graduate Haley Gaunt to pass by during the senior parade. (Sun Rise photo by Rory Schuler)

Congratulations
Johnston High School
Class of 2021

To the hardworking graduates of 2021, we salute your perseverance through a uniquely challenging senior year.

Best of luck as you take the next step!

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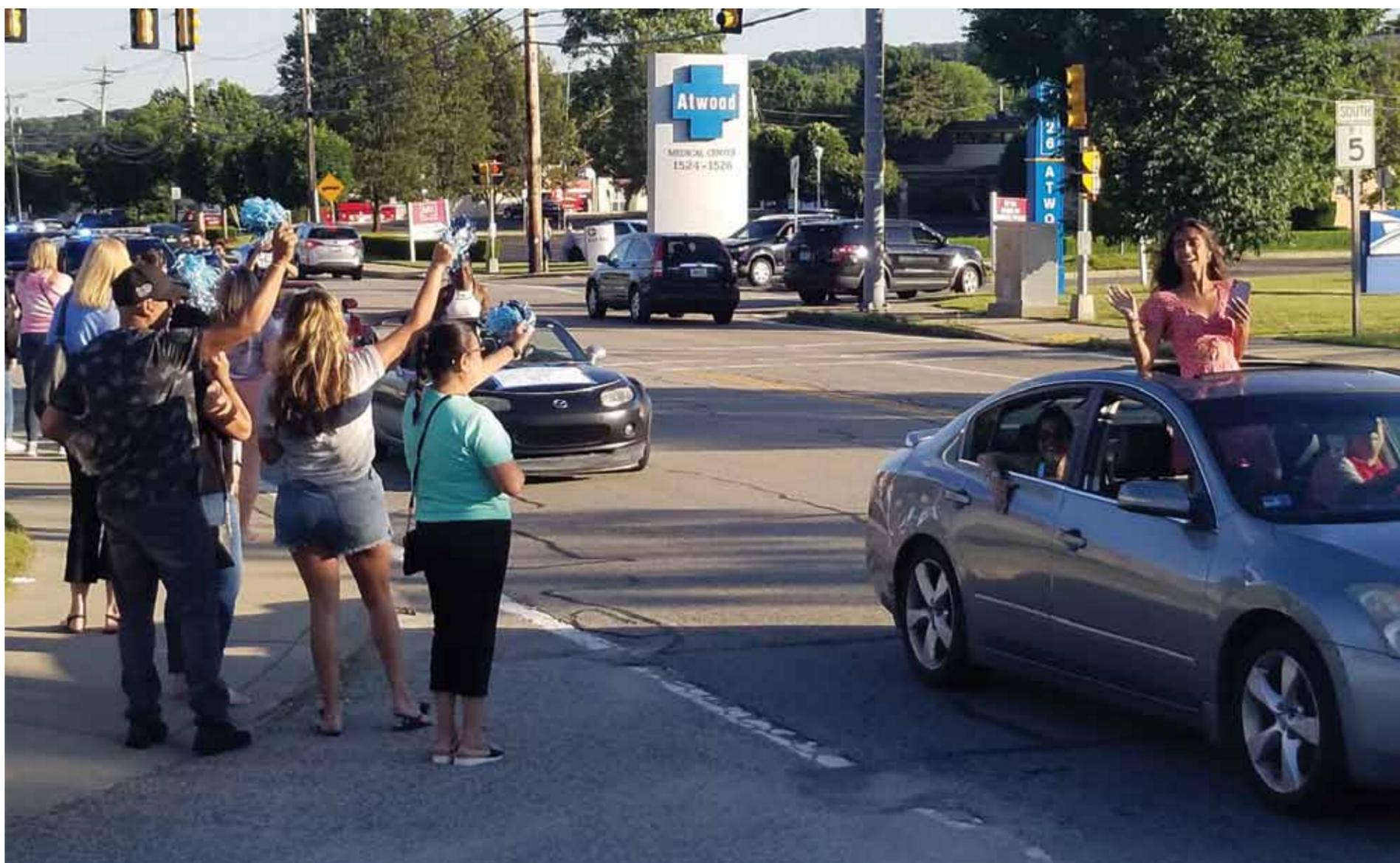
Woo-hoo you did it! You'll be going places! Big congratulations to this year's graduates!

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Johnston High School Class of 2021 TOP 10 STUDENTS



1. Kayla Aquilante

Valedictorian of the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Kayla Aquilante, of Lookout Avenue, plans to attend the University of Rhode Island in the fall.

She plans to major in Cell and Molecular Biology, and after she earns her degree, hopes to attend a Physician Assistant program and practice as a PA for her career.

Throughout her four years at Johnston High School, Aquilante participated and held office in many activities, including Peer Tutor, Academic Decathlon (junior year), Rhode Island Youth Force Traffic Safety Group, Providence County Youth Prevention Group and Float Committee.

She served as vice president of National Honor Society, Editor-In-Chief of the Yearbook Committee, and President of the Above the Influence organization.

"With our upcoming high school graduation, it has finally dawned upon me that all of the fun of high school is coming to an end," she said. "With this being said, my fondest memories are those formed at events like Battle of the Classes, Homecoming, Winter Ball, Senior Sendoff and float meetings. I also really enjoyed just spending time laughing with my friends in class."

Aquilante won many awards during each of her four years at Johnston High.

During her freshman year, she won second place at the school Science Fair.

During sophomore year, she won fourth place in the National History Day Writing Competition and second place at the Science Fair. She also won the Science Department Award, the Mathematics Department Award, the Social Studies Department Award and American History Excellence Award.

Aquilante won first place at the Science Fair during her junior year, as well as the Science Fair Best Biology Project Award. That year she was also the recipient of the Brown University Book Award.

In her final year at Johnston High, Aquilante won the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award, Excellence in English Award, the U.S. Air Force Math and Science Award, and the U.S. Marine Corps Scholastic Excellence Award.

"My friends were certainly fundamental to my success and enjoyment of high school," Aquilante said. "They were always there for me: helping me with my coursework, motivating me to keep going, and answering my dozens of FaceTime calls at ungodly hours of the night. Aside from assisting me with school, they knew how to have a good time!"

Aquilante looked within for motivation in attaining first in her class ranking.

"Upon learning in my sophomore year that I was ranked #1 in my class, I knew that I wanted to keep the position of valedictorian," she said. "While it was incredibly difficult to achieve this feat, I continued to persevere and work hard throughout high school to prove to myself that I was capable of such a massive accomplishment. I had no external factors motivating me to excel. Instead, I had an inner drive and desire to show myself that I could do it."

2. Audry Mahony

Salutatorian of the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Audry Mahony, of Elizabeth Ann Drive, plans to attend Smith College in the fall.

She intends to major in Environmental Science and Conservation Biology.

Mahony served as captain of the Academic Decathlon and Cross Country teams at Johnston High.

During her years at the school, Mahony was the recipient of several awards, including the Harvard Book Award, the Rhode Island Academic Decathlon Gold Medal Scholarship, the Math Department Award and the Spanish Department Award.

"I think I will mostly remember just how much I've changed as a person over my high school years, as well as all of the friends I've made along the way," Mahony said. "I think I'll remember all of the times I've gotten to explore and expand my interests, from forming a band in my sophomore year to volunteering to take care of animals with the Audubon Society."

Mahony was asked who contributed most to her success and enjoyment of high school.

"My friends always reminded me that academics aren't the most important aspect of being a student, to have fun in all of my endeavors," Mahony answered. "They definitely made my high school experience more enjoyable while we worked together in and outside of the classroom. They have always supported me, whether it meant ordering and buying baked goods from me when I needed to start saving gas money, or encouraging me to speak up for myself when it was necessary. We have always celebrated each other's successes, big and small, and I think that's something I can take with me as I transition into college and beyond."

Motivation is always key to any student's success.

"Overall, I think I'm a pretty self-motivated person," Mahony said. "I always want to get the most out of what I do, whether I'm competing in cross country or learning in the classroom. For me, 'excelling' academically was more about learning as much as I could and getting the most out of my education than it was getting good grades."



3. Nicholas Petrillo

Ranked third in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Nicholas Petrillo, of Bishop Hill Road, plans to attend Boston College in the fall.

He plans to major in Accounting and Business Management.

During his four years at Johnston High, Petrillo participated in many activities and held offices in several organizations.

Petrillo served as president of Student Council and captain of the Cross Country team for two years, each. He was a member of Students Against Dangerous Decisions (SADD), National Honor Society, Float Committee and Panther Cubs.

Petrillo was the recipient of several awards, including the Rhode Island General Treasurer's Young Leader Award (2020), the Rhode Island Secretary of State's Civic Leadership Award (2020), College Board AP Scholar Award (2020), and the Bryant University Book Award (2020).

Petrillo won first place in the Johnston High School Science Fair in both 2019 and 2020. He won the Excellence in Business Award, the U.S. Marine Corps Scholastic Excellence Award, The Herbert and Claiborne Pell Medal Award for Excellence in U.S. History, the Governor Daniel J. McKee Leadership Award, and the Mathematical Society Award.

"I will remember building the Homecoming float, student council meetings and my AP Biology Class the most," Petrillo said. "The friends I have made and the teachers who have gone the extra mile for their students will stick with me for the years to come."

When asked who contributed the most to his success and enjoyment of high school, Petrillo answered "my parents, Mr. Russo, Mr. DiMaio, Mrs. Nixon."

"My parents and teachers have motivated me to excel," Petrillo said. "I have also pushed myself to be the best I can be, both academically and in leadership roles."



4. Grace Centracchio

Ranked fourth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Grace Centracchio, of White Falls Trail, Wakefield, plans to attend Boston University in the fall.

She plans to major in Business Management and Organizations.

During her years at the school, Centracchio was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

She served as Vice President the Float Committee for Class Council, and Captain of the Cross Country team. She also participated in Outdoor Track & Field and Indoor Track.

Centracchio was a member of Junior National Honor Society and National Honor Society, Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Panther Cubs and Above the Influence.

She was the recipient of several awards at the school, including second place in the Science Fair in 2018, and first place in 2020.

Centracchio participated in the National History Day as part of the 2019 Rhode Island State History Fair. She earned the Outstanding Achievement in Spanish II Honors (2018-2019) and participated in the Rhode Island Science and Engineering Fair Senior Division in 2020.

Centracchio won the Boston College Alumni Association Book Award in 2020, and the Hopkins Family Memorial Scholarship, FM Global Scholarship and the Michael E. and Linda M. Contillo Scholarship.

"I will remember always having something to look forward to and be a part of, whether it be a class event, meet, or a variety of other tasks," Centracchio said. "I really enjoyed being involved academically, socially and athletically because there was truly never a dull moment."

Many people helped Centracchio along the way.

"My friends, family and teachers have each contributed greatly to my successful high school experience," she said. "Without them, it would not have been as fulfilling, enjoyable, and especially memorable."

Centracchio credited many motivations for helping her succeed.

"The idea of a successful future, being able to attend college, travel and achieve my dream career have definitely motivated me to excel," she said. "I also have to thank my parents, sisters, teachers, and classmates for their constant support and encouragement."



5. Trista Clark

Ranked fifth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Trista Clark, of Joan Drive, plans to attend Northeastern University in the fall. She plans to major in Biology.

During her years at the school, Clark was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

She was a member of Student Council, Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), and Float Committee. She served as Historian for the National Honor Society and Secretary of the Above the Influence organization.

Clark won the Science Department Award and the Salve Regina Book Award.

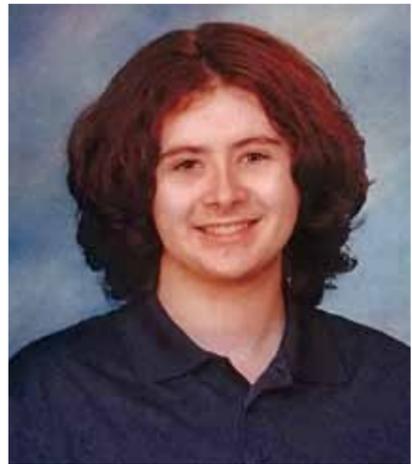
"I will remember the fun times with my friends in class and after-school activities," she said. "Additionally, I will remember the numerous school functions and field trips we attended over the last four years."

Many people helped Clark along the way.

"My teachers contributed the most to my success," Clark said. "They prepared me for my future endeavors and taught me life-long skills. My friends, classmates and advisors such as Mr. DiMaio and Mr. Russo contributed the most to my enjoyment of school. These advisors taught engaging and thoughtful lessons in school, while outside of school, they planned school dances, homecoming and other unforgettable school events."

Clark credited two individuals in particular for helping her succeed.

"My parents gave me the motivation to work hard and strive for excellence," she said. "Their support, time and dedication to my education led me to where I am today."



6. Derek Papa

Ranked sixth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Derek Papa, of Betsy Williams Circle, plans to attend Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in the fall.

He plans to study Interactive Media Design.

During his years at the school, Papa was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

He served as Vice President of the Above the Influence organization, Yearbook Editor and Peer Tutor.

Papa participated in the Academic Decathlon, Mock Trial and the Float Committee.

Papa said he would most remember "the many hours of hard work that finally culminated in a high rank and moving onto a college in order to pursue my passions," from his time at Johnston High.

Many people helped Papa along the way. "A few specific faculty members come to mind," he said. "Mrs. Chiulli deserves credit for almost every success in Johnston High School. She is the kindest and most supportive person you could find within the halls of JHS."

Several faculty members made a big impression on Papa.

"Mrs. Avila was the one who watched many of the Top Ten grow as students, and as people," Papa said. "Without her, our high school experience would have been severely lacking, whether it's because we wouldn't have someone to vent to or to write our letters or to make us feel safe in our Freshman year, she played an instrumental role in our development as people."

The senior class advisor also played a pivotal role.

"Finally, how could I ignore our class advisor Mr. DiMaio?" Papa asked. "Both having him as a teacher, where many life lessons were learned and ideas challenged, and as an advisor, meaning many important events are at least partially credited to his hard work, he played a very large part in the success of our class."

Papa credited one particular motivation in contributing to his success.

"The future," he said. "Simply put, I knew that if I didn't excel, then I might fail and failure meant being and doing something that didn't seem like the right path for me."

7. Laila Harrington



Ranked seventh in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Laila Harrington, of Mills Drive, plans to attend Southern Methodist University in the fall.

She plans to study Computer Science at the university.

During her years at the school, Harrington was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

She played on the Tennis Team, and served on the National Honor Society, World Cultures, and participated in the Academic Decathlon.

Harrington was awarded the Carcieri/Webber Scholarship.

"My friends and I formed a band together and we named it 'Girl Band,'" Harrington recalled as the most memorable experience she had at Johnston High. "We performed the song 'Sucker' by the Jonas Brothers."

Several people contributed to her success and enjoyment of high school.

"Along with my friends, my homeroom advisor and Spanish teacher Mrs. Avila, made school more enjoyable and taught me very important life lessons," Harrington said. "My tennis coach Mr. Barrette also motivated me to find a form of joy and success outside of academics."

Harrington credited two primary motivations for helping to contribute to her success.

"My family always encouraged me to excel in school, but I also found motivation in seeing my close friends do well alongside me," she said.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Class of 2021

Councilman Joseph Polisena Jr.

JOHNSTON HIGH SCHOOL INCORPORATED 1759

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I would like to recognize and thank all the teachers, administrators and parents for all the work and sacrifice on their part to prepare our graduating Class of 2021. It is no secret that our society has faced challenges like never before. I want to commend and congratulate the Class of 2021 for all your hard work. You are now part of a new generation of graduates that will have to focus and concentrate on your future whether it be furthering your education, continuing into a trade or starting your work life. You are the future of this wonderful country and we need now more than ever future leaders that will continue to preserve America's status as the greatest country in the world.

CONGRATULATIONS JOHNSTON HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2021

Robert V. Russo
DISTRICT 4 TOWN COUNCIL PRESIDENT

8. Vanessa Melgar

Ranked third in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Nicholas Petrillo, of Bishop Hill Road, plans to attend BRanked eighth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Vanessa Melgar, of Hillside Avenue, plans to attend the University of Rhode Island in the fall.

She plans to study Computer Science.

During her years at Johnston High, Melgar was the recipient of several awards at the school.

In tenth grade, she earned the Achievement in French Award. In the eleventh grade, she earned the AP Scholar with Honor Award, the University of Rhode Island Foundation and Alumni Engagement Book Award. And during her senior year, she won the Mayor and Town Council Scholarship.

"The start of my high school career will always be filled with the gratifying days I have spent with my family and friends," Melgar said. "Despite this, my final two years will likely be the most memorable. Seeing as the Covid-19 pandemic has taken such a tight hold over me, as it has on the entire world, I will never forget how someone's life can be so greatly impacted in such a short period of time."

A large group of supporters contributed to Melgar's success and enjoyment of high school.

"The pandemic has managed to fill my days with anxiety and fear," she said. "However, through the help of my teachers and loved ones, I was able to make it through these difficult times. My mother and father, especially, have done so much to support me over these four years. Their ability to adapt and fight through this pandemic has inspired me to work harder than ever. My family and friends have done so much to help me succeed and take pride in where I am today."

Melgar found motivation to succeed when she looked toward the future.

"My primary motivation to maintain high grades in school comes from my desire to attend university without the financial burdens that come along with obtaining a college degree," she said. "My strive for excellence has also allowed me to successfully complete this portion of my life with a sense of fulfillment. My new goal leaving high school is to work towards a respectable career in which I will be able to focus on helping the people around me."



9. Nicholas Cronan

Ranked ninth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Nicholas Cronan, of Paradise Lane, plans to attend Johnson & Wales University in the fall.

He plans to major in Political Science.

During his years at the school, Cronan was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

He served as Class President during his time on Student Council. He was a member of the Class of 2021 Float Committee, Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Above the Influence, Panther Cubs, National Junior Honor Society and the National Honor Society.

Cronan was the recipient of the Senior Class President Award and the Excellence in Architecture Award.

"Of all the memories made from my high school years, I will most remember the many friends I have made throughout the span of the past four years," Cronan said. "Being Class President since I was a freshman has allowed me to engage in countless activities for the school, especially float and homecoming, and the social aspect of JHS has been the most rewarding for me."

A core group of supporters contributed to Cronan's success and enjoyment of high school.

"It is undeniable that the success and enjoyment of my high school years wouldn't have been possible without the support of my friends, and love of my family," he said. "Having the privilege of spending most of my days with my friends the past four years has truly engaged me in a more enriching social life, and having my family by my side has helped me succeed in all my endeavors."

Cronan credited several primary motivations for helping to contribute to his success.

"What mainly motivated me to excel was the endless support of those around me, as it would be impossible in a year as challenging as this to accomplish our goals without the encouragement of the people most important to us," he said. "Regardless of how difficult it has been for many seniors to see success beyond high school, it has and always will be essential for us to enjoy our time with our loved ones in order to persevere."



10. Olaitan (Lala) Olagundoye

Ranked tenth in the Johnston High School Class of 2021, Olaitan (Lala) Olagundoye, of George Waterman Road, plans to attend Quinnipiac University in the fall.

She plans to earn a dual-degree Bachelor of Science in health Science, and a Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

During her years at the school, Olagundoye was a member of many organizations and participated in a long list of school activities.

She served as captain of the Indoor and Outdoor Track and Field Teams. She also served as captain of the Girls Soccer Team and the Mock Trial team.

Olagundoye served on Student Council. She was a member of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and Above the Influence, and World Cultures.

She also ran Cross Country.

During her years at Johnston High School, Olagundoye won many awards and honors.

She won the Civic Leadership Award in 2020.

She also earned distinctive athletic honors, including the Rhode Island Girls Track and Field First Team All-State in Long Jump and High Jump (2021), State Champion in High Jump (2019-2021), State Champion in Long Jump (2021), Rhode Island Track and Field Coaches Award and All-Academic Award (2021), Providence Journal Female Honoree for Indoor Track and Field (2021), RIIL Athlete of the Year Finalist (2021) and the RIIL Student-Athlete Athletic Achievement Award (2021).

"In becoming a member of many extra curricular activities, I realized my love for helping others and for making people smile," Olagundoye said. "Being a part of a team or a club really accentuated my high school experience and it introduced me to many new people who quickly became my friends ... The ability to build connections and develop new relationships with the people around me is one of the most rewarding aspects of me going to school daily."

Olagundoye will cherish many high school memories.

"When I think about instances that may make me 'come alive,' physical activity, such as playing sports with my team, come to mind," she said. "But when physical activity becomes integrated into helping other people do the things they love, that is when I truly come to life. There's just something about seeing peoples' faces light up when they can finally do something they so longed to do, that always manages to put a smile on my face and prompts me to continue to help people in any way I can. I believe that I have the characteristics of an exemplary leader, with the ability to have a positive influence on others around me. With this, I intend on paying the opportunities that I have been given forward, in acting as a leader and contributing my support to those in need of guidance."

A large group of supporters contributed to Olagundoye's success and enjoyment of high school.

"My sisters, Tolani, Jummy, Tobi and Josephine," Olagundoye said. "My parents, Richard and Benedicta. Mr. DiMaio, my advisor, coach and teacher. Mr. Russo, my teacher, advisor and friend. Mrs. Fagundes, my coach, who encouraged me to be the best student athlete I could be. Mr. Saravo, freshman year biology teacher who sparked my interest in the study of life and encourages me daily."

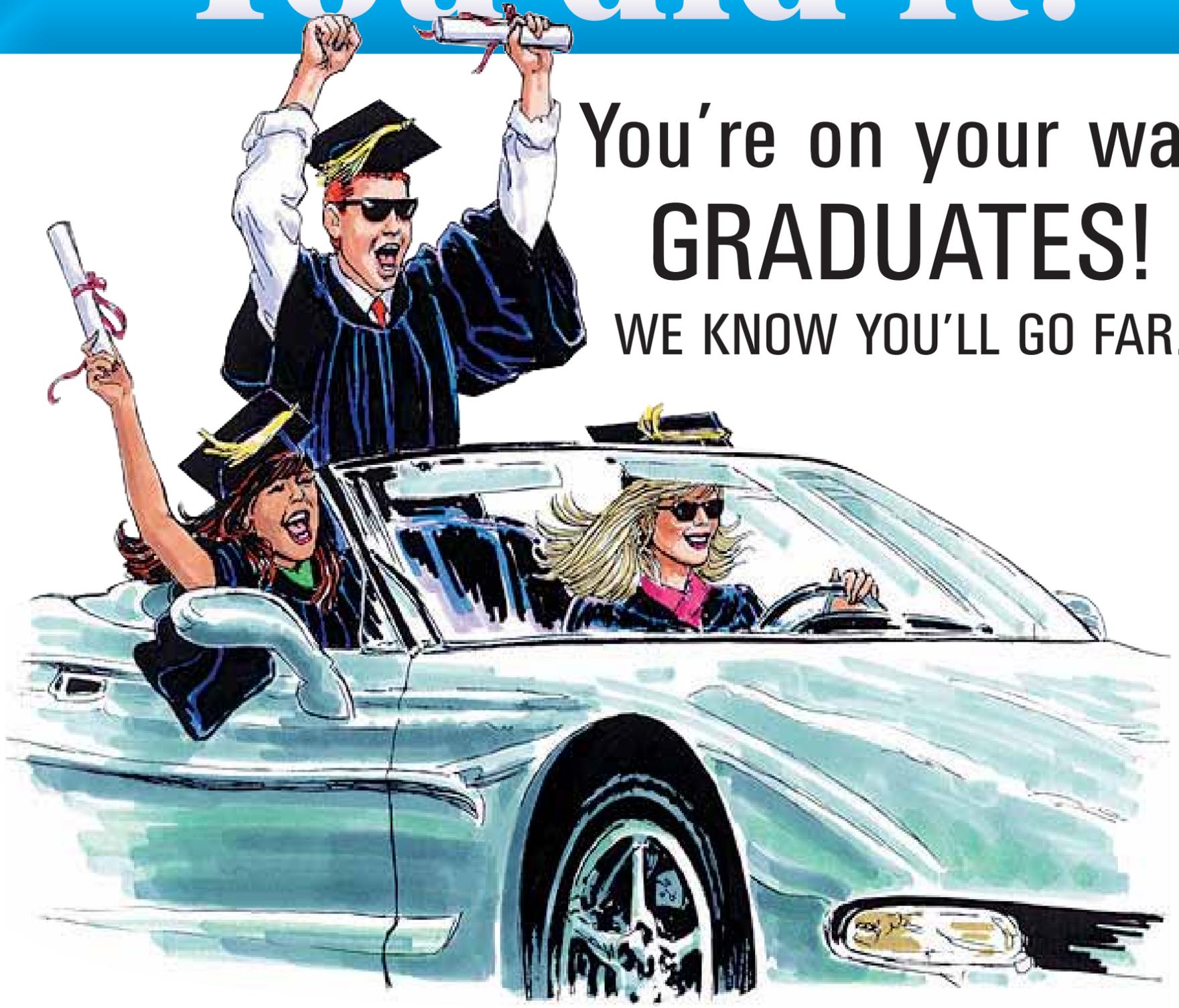
Olagundoye looked to her family for motivations as she excelled in high school.

"My family's history and the determination of my parents, especially that of my mother, have really contribute to my ethics and my moral decency," she said. "I am now living in this 'American Dream' that my parents dreamed of, and achieved. Witnessing my parents struggle and sacrifice to provide a good life for my four sisters and I, I vowed myself that I too would work hard to be the best me I could be, while spreading love and kindness to others. It is my goal to make my parents proud and to show them that their strenuous efforts are being paid off through my success!"



You did it!

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**Congratulations to the
Johnston High School
Class of 2021**


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