



Grand Island High School

GIHS commencement June 28 at Beaver Island State Park

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI
Contributor

Calling the 2020 Grand Island High School graduation inside Beaver Island State Park on June 28 a "one of a kind event," Principal Michael Lauria praised his committee and New York state officials for their efforts in preparing for this unique ceremony.

When it became clear two months ago Grand Island's customary annual graduation ceremony could not be held because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a committee was created that met virtually each Tuesday to create a graduation plan.

The committee included Grand Island Central School District Superintendent Brian S. Graham; Lauria; GIHS assistant principals Hillary Kretz-Harvey and Karen Surdyke; Cheryl Chamberlain, a business teacher and the graduation coordinator; Mark Gorton, the district's technology and audio-visual technician; and seniors Lucas Kruse, Luke Hess, Mikayla Robinson, Sean Christian Rustowicz, Gabriella Bergstrom, Karie Stedman and Brett Shickluna.

"Because of all the restrictions placed upon us early on, our worry was we would only be able to create a remote video to distribute to our graduating students," Lauria explained. "As restrictions eased, we began discussing ways we could follow social distancing rules by remaining in our cars. We really wanted to have the event on Grand Island in a space that could accommodate everyone."

An obvious location was Beaver Island State Park, but since it is owned by New York state,

the district enlisted the assistance of State Sen. Chris Jacobs and Assemblyman Angelo Morinello, who both agreed to write Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo seeking permission. Once that was received, they met with the Erie County Department of Health officials to ensure their plans followed the guidelines.

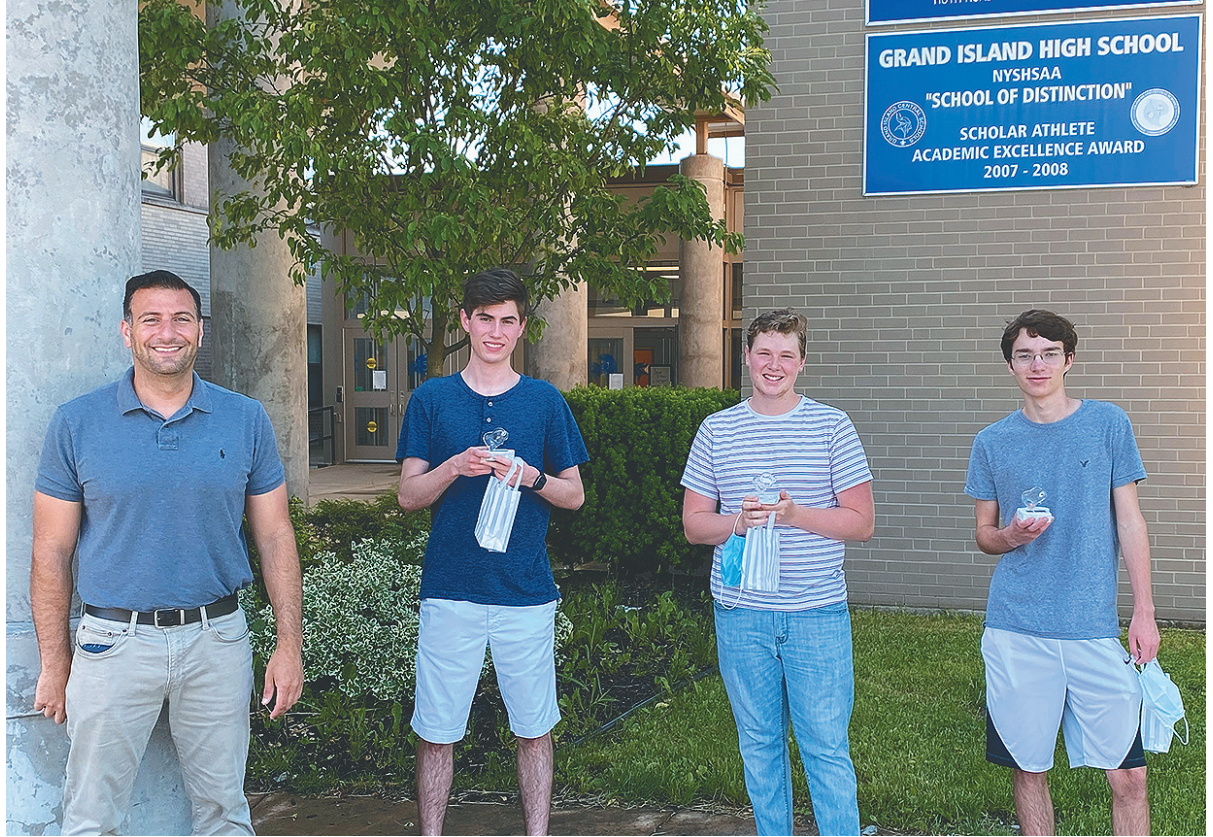
"Our senior class has gone from losing so much, from proms to end-of-year celebrations, and now they were concerned about not having a proper way to recognize their hard work as students," Lauria said.

"Now, they can prepare for a graduation ceremony no one has ever experienced before. It's new, it's creative, different and something they will probably talk about and remember for the rest of their lives. It will certainly be a one-of-a-kind event, unlike any other graduation ceremony at Grand Island High School," he added.

Chamberlain, who is also the DECA coordinator, added, "The Class of 2020 will always have such a special place in our hearts. This has been a challenging year, but I have such a dedicated team of faculty and staff who want to make this graduation ceremony one for the record books. We are so sad our time with these special students was cut short this year."

School concluded June 16. The seniors received a detailed graduation plan emailed to them that included a video from Graham about how the ceremony will be held.

Each student will receive one ticket for one car for their family and the graduate is asked to sit in the passenger seat for the ceremony, which begins at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, June 28. Cars will be



From left, Grand Island High School Principal Mike Lauria and seniors Lucas Kruse, Luke Hess and Colby Kalp, who were recognized as the school's top three high academic achieving students. Graduation is Sunday at Beaver Island State Park.

spaced appropriately in the main lot facing the golf course and two stages. The event will be live streamed by Frank Wolf of WNY Athletics and broadcast live on 88.5 FM.

When the roll call of graduates begins, cars will be dismissed and graduates will exit at the second stage, wearing their cap and gown, and walk across the stage without a mask on to receive the diploma cover. They return to the car and drive to the Falconwood Clubhouse where they will receive the envelope with their diploma and other awards. They will then follow the road back to the parking lot where they will

watch their classmates walk the stage. Students are encouraged to decorate the vehicles and place a blue heart somewhere on it as a show of support for the Class of 2020.

Luke Hess, a co-president of the school's Rotary Club of Grand Island's Interact club and a co-founder of Casey's Cabana who will attend the University at Buffalo, is extremely excited about the upcoming graduation ceremony, saying, "This truly is a different senior year as we could not experience our senior class day or graduation at Kleinhans Music Hall and walking across the stage to receive

our diploma. Under these current conditions, our graduation will be unique to other schools around because we will still be able to walk across a stage and do it in our hometown. It just shows how united we are as the class of 2020."

Lauria added, "Our graduates will not feel left out or unimportant after they have gone through this ceremony and had an opportunity to be recognized like no one else has ever been at Grand Island High School."

See the Class of 2020 photo on the back page of today's Island Dispatch.

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Class of 2020 photo



Hardwick announces Erie County road project slated for Grand Island

Erie County DPW will mill, overlay Stony Point Road

At its June 18 legislative session, the Erie County Legislature unanimously approved a resolution authorizing a mill-and-overlay project for Stony Point Road, between Whitehaven and Beaver Island State Park.

Erie County Legislator Kevin Hardwick, who represents Grand Island said, "I'm glad we are safely getting back to business as usual in Erie County. Maintaining our roads and bridges has always been one of the most im-



portant ways Erie County serves our residents, and I know this infrastructure project will make a

great difference to the residents of Grand Island."

According to Hardwick, Stony Point Road will have its top layer of pavement removed and a new layer applied, likely in August. The project is expected to cost over \$300,000 to complete and is roughly 1.14 miles.

Additional information or updates can be obtained from the Department of Public Works website at www.erie.gov/dpw.



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