

Press Clippings 05-15-21 to 05-17-21

---Press Clippings---05/17/2021
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---The Courier-News ---05/16/2021
U-46 to hold five live high school graduations
But tickets are limited, guests to get pod seating
By: Mike Danahey



NOW Arena operations manager Eliel Cardenas uses a strapping kit Tuesday to prevent some seats from being used so the Hoffman Estates venue can create family pods for graduation ceremonies. School District U-46 will hold five events there May 29. Mike Danahey/Courier-News

Live graduation ceremonies for District U-46 high school students will bring a semblance of normal to an anything-but-a-normal school year, but that doesn't mean everything will return to how it was before the pandemic.

NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates, where U-46 commencements have been held on Memorial Day weekend since 2007, can accommodate 11,000 people but a maximum 4,000 will be allowed in for each of the five high schools' hour-long ceremonies, district spokeswoman Mary Fergus said. The first starts at 8 a.m. and the last at 8 p.m.

Students' families will be given a limited number of tickets and parking passes and will sit in one of 664 designated "pods" to ensure social distancing, according to NOW Arena General Manager Ben Gibbs. Graduates will be separated by space as well and mask usage mandatory for everyone.

"Guests are being assigned specific seating sections," Gibbs said. "Once they arrive at their section, they may select any available seating pod. The seats between the pods will be disabled, so each pod of guests will be socially distanced from the next pod."

There won't be room for bands or choirs, he said, and no food or drinks will be sold so crews can devote their time to cleaning and sanitizing.

Guests, graduates and district staff will be allowed to bring in one 12-ounce bottle of water, with the only exceptions being made for infants, small children and those with medical conditions, Gibbs said.

There will be three speakers at each ceremony — Superintendent Tony Sanders, the school principal and one student class representative, Fergus said.

Once a ceremony ends, guests will be released by section to avoid congestion, Gibbs said.

Although indoor tickets will be limited, there will be room outside for anyone who wants to watch the ceremony on video screens in the west parking lot, Gibbs said. Ceremonies can be viewed live online as well, he said.

NOW Arena has held some small gatherings for a few hundred people on the mezza

nine or in the lounge, but the 20 graduations scheduled will be the first large events since pandemic restrictions went into place in March 2020, Gibbs said.

"We've been discussing graduations with the various school districts for over six months," he said.

Initially they thought they might have to set up ceremonies in the parking lot but then the state started to loosen mitigation restrictions, he said.

The arena's first commencement will be May 20, and among those scheduled this month are District 300 high schools on May 21-22 and Burlington Central High School on May 27.

Fergus said U-46 will spend about \$85,000 for the commencements.

"That includes arena rental of \$60,000 for all five ceremonies, including live streaming and using the outdoor screens," she said. "Additional labor inside is approximately \$15,000. An outdoor internet line is \$750. Stage expenses — extra ramp, plants, banners — will cost around \$5,000," Fergus said.

South Elgin High School has 607 graduates and will go first at 8 a.m., followed by Elgin High School with 645 graduates at 11 a.m., Bartlett with 530 graduates at 2 p.m., Larkin with 497 graduates at 5 p.m. and Streamwood with 450 graduates at 8 p.m.

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