

Press Clippings 05/01/20 to 05/04/20

---Daily Herald---05/04/2020

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE CLASS OF 2020

How schools are creating special moments for seniors

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Streamwood High School Principal Jennifer Van Deusen and 80 volunteers delivered yard signs last week to the homes of high school seniors.



Elgin Area School District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders picks up yard signs from Streamwood High School Principal Jennifer Van Deusen on his way to deliver them to seniors' homes last week.



Streamwood High School Principal Jennifer Van Deusen and 80 volunteers delivered yard signs to the homes of graduating seniors. It's one of the ways schools are trying to recognize graduating seniors who have missed out on final-year milestones.



Streamwood High School Principal Jennifer Van Deusen and 80 volunteers deliver yard signs to the homes of graduating seniors. Schools across the suburbs are recognizing their soon-to-be graduates in a variety of ways in the absence of having graduation ceremonies.

Yard signs. Banners in the town center. Car parades. Lots of virtual recognitions.

These are some of the ways suburban high school educators are making the final school year special for graduating seniors amid the COVID-19 lockdown.

Illinois' stay-at-home order now extending through the rest of the school year has foiled many time-honored senior milestones, including athletic events, proms, spring plays and concerts, special recognitions and, most importantly, graduation ceremonies that have been canceled or delayed until summer.

“Our heart goes out to all these kids because they have missed so many markers in their life,” said Daniel Klett, principal of Wauconda High School. “We want to give hope to kids. We are trying to find ways to keep them engaged and let them have something that they can remember of a poor situation.”

Many seniors might consider the setbacks a disappointment. But Sam Bogner of Schaumburg has found a silver lining.

“I’ve never really seen my school more united than it is now,” said the 18-year-old Schaumburg High School senior. “All the staff and students are working together just to kind of honor each other and make the best out of the situation.”

Bogner said seniors are making a video honoring spring sports and activities that have been the highlight of their high school years, compiling quotes and memories for the school yearbook, and creating a map of the colleges students will attend.

Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 has other activities in the works, including drive-by parades, virtual recognitions and lighting up stadiums on Friday nights. The district is moving ahead with separate virtual graduation ceremonies for its five schools on originally scheduled dates in May. Officials also are exploring the possibility of live gatherings in June or July.

“Even though we are not able to actually be there, we still have plenty of opportunities to symbolically be there,” said Bogner, who is excited about picking up his cap and gown next week. “I’m going to be walking across my living room on May 20. (It) is a really big deal for me.”

Many school leaders are holding out hope that live graduation ceremonies will be possible this summer.

Wauconda's Klett has set a tentative July 21 date for in-person graduation, and is trying to set a date for prom that month as well. The school is planning a virtual graduation in early June for 320 seniors. Students will submit photos and 10-second videos wearing their gowns and honor cords, and some will deliver speeches.

Elgin Area School District U-46 canceled its five high school graduations for more than 2,600 seniors that had been rescheduled for July 11 at the Sears Centre Arena in Hoffman Estates. Instead, the district plans virtual celebrations June 13. Officials also have been planting "Class of 2020" yard signs at seniors' homes.

Streamwood High School officials recorded a special video for seniors, singing to the tune of the "Friends" theme song, "to let them know that we care for them and we are here for them," Principal Jennifer Van Deusen said.

"Our yard sign is not going to replace the memories of prom and of a ceremony," Van Deusen said. "We want to honor their accomplishments and recognize them. We are trying to do that on a community level."

End-of-year recognitions and honors night for the top 2% of graduating seniors will be done virtually. And funds students raised for prom will go toward a class reunion in December, she said.

Northwest Suburban High School District 214 is planning a separate virtual commencement ceremony for each of its six schools May 20. In-person graduations complete with caps and gowns on football fields will occur if the state allows large gatherings in June, July or August.

Naperville Unit District 203 is planning for in-person graduations in July. Naperville North has prom scheduled for July 17 and graduation July 19, at the Embassy Suites in Naperville. Yearbooks, caps and gowns will be distributed in May, while other senior traditions are under review.

"It's important that we give seniors that closure," District 203 spokeswoman Sinikka Mondini said. The graduations are planned "far enough in the future that we hope will be able to come to fruition," she said.

Winfield Village President Erik Spande has offered to put up banners honoring seniors from West Chicago High School District 94, Wheaton-Warrenville Unit District 200, St. Francis High School and Wheaton Academy.

"A banner in Town Center isn't the same thing, but it is the least we can do," he wrote on Facebook.

Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire is recognizing graduates with "Senior Shoutouts" on Instagram. Parents have created yard signs honoring seniors and organized a sale, with proceeds benefiting the Stevenson Foundation's fund to help struggling families.

"We are putting together some videos to honor graduating seniors that will be released throughout the month of May," spokesman Jim Conrey said.

Officials have set tentative dates for prom and graduation in June and July at the Sears Centre. If large gatherings aren't allowed until August or later, the school will not have commencement or prom, Conrey said.

---Press Clippings---05/03/2020
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---Daily Herald---05/02/2020
How U-46 serves families thousands of meals weekly
By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Karen Roman, center, and a team of about a dozen a half-dozen workers assembled meal bags Friday to be given out at Coleman Elementary School in Elgin. They put together 530 bags that had single servings of breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack, including fresh fruits and vegetables.



Constantina Valle De Munoz organizes meal bags Friday to be given out at Coleman Elementary School in Elgin. They assembled 530 bags that had single servings of breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack.



Fresh apples were among the items loaded into meal bags and passed out to school children at Coleman Elementary School in Elgin Friday.

When Elgin Area School District U-46 closed schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a cadre of 160 essential workers stepped up to keep feeding a multitude of students and families in need.

Karen Roman-Martinez is among those unsung heroes — food service workers risking their health to prepare, bag and distribute thousands of meals, including breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack items, for families to pick up each week. “We serve the community,” said Roman-Martinez, 35, of Hoffman Estates, a food service lead at Coleman Elementary in Elgin. “I’m always willing to help. I really love my job.”

Roman-Martinez said her reward is seeing the smiles on the faces of students and their families when they drive up to receive food.

“I really do miss the kids,” she said. “They always make my day. I am the lunch lady.”

U-46 food service workers must follow rigorous safety protocols, including washing hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, wearing masks, gloves and observing social distancing rules as they work the assembly line on a roughly 6-hour shift starting at 7:30 a.m. On Mondays and Wednesdays, workers bag double the amount of food to last two days. More than a 1,000 bags are distributed at Coleman alone, Roman-Martinez said. Food is distributed three days a week at 26 sites, including the district’s main office in Elgin and elementary schools spread throughout its 11 communities.

Since March 17, the district has distributed 781,011 meals and 260,337 snacks prepared at the district’s commissary at 1150 Bowes Road in Elgin.

“On the first day we served 12,600 meals and today we served 47,532,” said Elena Hildreth, U-46 food and nutrition services director. “It has grown substantially. We had no idea of the volume.”

Demand has increased steadily at schools with a larger population of students eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program, such as Coleman.

“Some of our food and nutrition service staff have started taking meals because their spouses are not working,” Hildreth said. “We’ve been blessed with the same people since the beginning (working) at the same locations.”

---The Courier-News---05/02/2020

Coronavirus roundup: Giving Tuesday event to help Elgin nonprofits, U-46 doing parent survey, Dolphin Cove not opening this summer

By: Rafael Guerrero



Dolphin Cove Family Aquatic Center in Carpentersville will not be opening this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.(Dundee Township Park District / HANDOUT)

A special Giving Tuesday campaign will be held this week because of the toll the coronavirus pandemic has taken on nonprofit organizations, and Elgin-area agencies are hoping they can count on residents' support.

Set up the same way as it is on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, donations can be made directly by going directly to individual nonprofit websites — local or national — or by going through the Elgin Gives website, www.elgingives.org/. There, donors will find a list of more than 65 Elgin-area charities seeking assistance and direct links to contribution pages.

“The day is designed to drive an influx of generosity, citizen engagement, business and philanthropy activation, and support for communities and nonprofits around the world,” according to a statement on the Elgin Gives site.

Charities run the gamut from food pantries to youth groups to organizations devoted to the arts, medical fundraising, women, children and family support, ecology, education, animal, park and history preservation causes. To see the list or make a donation, go to www.elgingives.org/.

The Dolphin Cove Family Aquatic Center in Carpentersville will not open this summer, the Dundee Township Park District said.

Families that purchased a pool pass for the 2020 season will be given the option to extend their pass into 2021 or receive a refund, according to a park district news release.

Officials did not rule out the possibility that swimming will be allowed at its Sleepy Hollow pool this summer, but it would depend on “ever-changing safety guidelines” from local, state, and national authorities, the release said.

“The Dundee Township Park District Board and staff feel this is the right decision to ensure the safety and well-being of the community, visitors and staff as we continue to cope with how the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds,” the release said.

The Huffman Park Splash Pad in West Dundee is also closed until further notice.

The district has also canceled its June slate of Concerts in the Park, the June 14 Randall Oaks 5K and Kids Fun Runs, the June 16 Family Night in the Park, and concert and fireworks scheduled for June 27. Its summer camp programs will not feature any field trips or swim days.

Dundee Township Park District and the Elgin Parks and Recreation Department facilities will remain closed through the end of May. While most of Elgin’s Hawthorn Hill Nature Center is closed, its trails are open from dawn until dusk, a release said.

U-46 doing survey on its COVID-19 response, distance learning

U-46 is asking families to complete a survey on the school district’s COVID-19 response and its distance learning by Tuesday.

Families were sent a link to the survey earlier in the week and it also can be found on the district’s website, www.u-46.org/.

The survey addresses three topics: food and housing needs of district families, technology and internet service, and remote learning experiences to date. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete and is available in English and Spanish, a district news release said.

The multiple-choice, short-answer survey is anonymous, although it does collect respondents’ demographic data, including what school their child attends, the release said.

Parents with multiple children in U-46 schools can take a survey for each child, and an option to provide a name and contact information will be provided so district officials can address issues involving a specific student, the release said.

This survey is being conducted by Boston-based Panorama Education, the firm U-46 has used to gauge reaction to its full-day kindergarten program.

A separate survey will be sent to students in May to obtain information on equity and inclusion issues.

---The Courier-News---05/01/2020

U-46’s July graduation ceremonies canceled

District plans virtual commencement for class of 2020 on June 13

By: Rafael Guerrero

School District U-46 reversed course on its commencement ceremonies for the class of 2020, canceling the July 11 in-person event at the Sears Centre in favor of a virtual graduation on June 13.

Superintendent Tony Sanders said the decision was made in order to ensure participants’ safety as the coronavirus pandemic continues.

“Words can’t express my disappointment regarding the loss of this in-person celebration with students, families and colleagues,” Sanders wrote in a message to students, parents and staff.

“I always say (graduation day) is the best day of the year. I trust our community understands that we must listen to our state health care and government experts and do all we can to mitigate the spread of this disease,” he said. “I know that does not make it easy. I am so proud of all our seniors and how they’ve handled this uncertain time. I am keeping you all in my thoughts.”

Guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education, uncertainty on how long the pandemic might last and difficulty in ensuring the social distancing that might be needed all played a role in the district’s decision, Sanders said.

In-person graduation ceremonies are prohibited for now because they fall under the state’s ban on large gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19, State Superintendent Carmen Ayala said. It’s not know when that decree is going to be lifted.

District U-46, which has five high schools, traditionally has held several graduation ceremonies over the course of one day at the Sears Centre in Hoffman Estates, events that are attended by hundreds of students and their families. The mid-May ceremonies initially rescheduled to July will now be online only.

“I know that our team will continue to do as much as possible to celebrate and recognize the amazing accomplishments of the class of 2020 during the month of May and at the June ceremony,” Sanders said in his note.

More details about the 2 p.m. June 13 program will be forthcoming, he said.