

Hancock High School

Class size: 306
Valedictorian: Holly McKenzie, daughter of Bruce and Laurraine McKenzie of Diamondhead
Salutatorian: Maggie Stolz, daughter of Thomas Stolz and Carole Stolz of Diamondhead
Principal: Tara Ladner
The White Gown: Kenneth Sprouse proudly wore Hancock High's white graduation gown, which the class of 2015 autographed when they were freshmen. The gown represents the courage to overcome obstacles.

HANCOCK HIGH

Graduates leave mark of leadership

By **KRISTIE LAL**
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KILN — Hancock High School's commons area was filled with nervous faces as students chatted with friends before lining up for graduation.

Graduating Hawks stood together in small groups, smiling and laughing in their caps and gowns as they snapped photos with their smartphones to upload to Instagram.

The students lined up alphabetically in the gymnasium,

then made their grand entrance onto Brett Favre Field.

Valedictorian Holly McKenzie started her speech with a sobering statistic: "Being afraid to fail is the No. 1 killer of dreams." She encouraged her class to follow their dreams wherever they may take them.

"We cannot let bad experiences and failures shrink our hearts. Instead, let us give more reason to cherish the beauty in our lives," she said.

Hancock's class of 2015 has achieved a lot this year.

Principal Tara Ladner said the 306 graduates received a total of \$6.1 million in scholarships.

"This class has helped us reach the highest academic achievement in the school's history, which ranked us as the No. 2 high school in the state of Mississippi," Assistant Superintendent Donnie Gholston said. "They are a very positive class. They have been very involved in community service, promoting school spirit and being great leaders for students coming up; for that we are blessed."



KRISTIE LAL/SUN HERALD
Valedictorian Holly McKenzie and salutatorian Maggie Stolz pause for a picture before graduation at Hancock High School on Friday.



VICKI TERRINONI/SPECIAL TO THE SUN HERALD
Salutatorian Brennan Newton and Valedictorian Delaney Williams

PASS HIGH 131 grads end an era

By **VICKI TERRINONI**
 Special to the Sun Herald

Family, friends and faculty crowded into the gymnasium of Pass Christian High School as 131 graduates ended one era of their lives and prepared to begin another.

Superintendent Beth Johns spoke to the class about changes since they started kindergarten in 2002.

"A gallon of gas was \$1.30. Kelly Clarkson won the very first 'American Idol,' Apple opened iTunes, the most popular toy was Chicken Dance Elmo and the most repeated quote was 'my Precious' from 'Lord of the Rings,'" she said.

Then Johns offered the students advice from current kindergartners in Pass Christian.

"Follow the rules, behave in the library, look at all the jobs others have and then pick a cool one, or flip a penny when choosing a job, or even think real hard about your job. Take a cookbook or at least a recipe. Give your family something like a teddy bear to remember you and your family should eat something so they will not miss you so much.

"Also, studying is hard, but even boys can go to college."

"These kindergartners are pretty wise," Johns said as she urged the class to follow the rules, think hard about their future and take the focus off themselves.

"Think beyond yourselves," she said.

Pass Christian High School

Class size: 131
Valedictorian: Delaney Williams, daughter of Allyson Williams
Salutatorian: Brennan Newton, son of Bruce and Terri Newton
Principal: Robyn Killebrew
Observation: The class of 2015 is the "Unbreakable Class" because they stood together through Hurricane Katrina's destruction, the rebuilding of the school and community and shared grief after the May 2014 death of a classmate.

CHRISTIAN COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

Graduates recall faith and memories

By **CECILY CUMMINGS**
 Special to the Sun Herald

As Christian Collegiate Academy of Gulfport held its commencement exercises on Friday night in the Bible Baptist Church sanctuary, thoughts turned to the students' spiritual faith and cherished memories.

Valedictorian Gordin Smith thanked families and teachers for their guidance and discussed the importance of a biblical worldview of education at CCA.

"A biblical worldview allows us to see the world according to God's word and to understand the hopes and dreams that make us human," he said.

"A biblical worldview has given us the foundation to face life's challenges."

Salutatorian Morgan Cobb reflected on her senior year, remarking that their small class size of 17 created a true sense of family among students. She said close relationships with teachers and students were among her best memories at CCA.

At the reception following graduation in the school gymnasium, parents had prepared memory tables in honor of each student in the graduating class.

As guests looked over the childhood photos, awards



Smith Cobb

Christian Collegiate Academy

Class size: 17
Valedictorian and parents: Gordin Smith, son of Quinton and Pamela Smith
Salutatorian and parents: Morgan Cobb, daughter of Craig and Kari Cobb
Principal: Carol Roberts
Quote: "We can move mountains, build bridges and unite countries. Without love, we gain nothing."
 — Valedictorian Gordin Smith

and special mementos, they could recall the closing words of Smith's speech:

"Wherever we go when we leave here, you know that we are ready for whatever comes our way," he said.

"Thank you our teachers, mentors, coaches and parents for teaching us values that give our life meaning and purpose."

PASCAGOULA HIGH

'It's a rite of passage,' says salutatorian

By **VETO ROLEY**
 Special to the Sun Herald

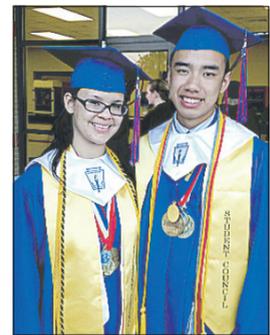
PASCAGOULA — Pascagoula High School seniors marked the end of one era and the beginning of another as 253 students accepted their high school diplomas Friday night.

"It's a rite of passage," salutatorian Stephanie Poiroux said before the ceremony. "We are going from young adults to full adults. We are learning to stand on our own and achieve greater things."

In his keynote speech, valedictorian Brian Ko remarked at the changes from ninth grade to his senior year. As a freshman, Ko said, his "quiet nature and good grades defined who he was."

But as he grew, Ko said he took a more active role within the class. Saying his story was common among many of his classmates, he said, "My senior year was a pleasant surprise. I'm not sure I could have had as much fun in school if I didn't go to Pascagoula High School."

However, as well as his senior year went, Ko told his fellow seniors "everything from this point on will be different" and he urged them to seek better things in the future, whether they were going to college, joining the



Salutatorian Stephanie Poiroux, left, and valedictorian Brian Ko pause before Pascagoula High School graduation ceremonies Friday.

Pascagoula High School

Class size: 253
Valedictorian: Brian Ko, son of Pengeap Ko and Jenyfer Keang
Salutatorian: Stephanie Poiroux, daughter of Duane Poiroux and Samantha Poiroux
Principal: Ronald Roberts
Quote: "If anyone tells you that your best days were in high school, they are looking the wrong way."
 — Valedictorian Brian Ko

military or going into the work force.

"If someone tells you the best years of your life were in high school, they are looking in the wrong direction," he said.

MOSS POINT HIGH

Love, approval greet grads

By **KAREN NELSON**
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MOSS POINT — It wasn't about speeches or formalities.

Moss Point High School's graduation Friday night was about family and their way of recognizing each student who walked across the stage with a cheer and a roar of approval.

It was also about love and innovation.

For the first time in recent history, the Moss Point High graduating class raised money to give a scholarship to one of its own.

The class of 2015 selected classmate Joseph Montgomery, they said, because he lost his grandfather this year.

Salutatorian Shawneice Elexis Lynn White advised her fellow students to "approach life like a tiger — aggressively," and reminded them there will be trials, tribulations and



Terry White

setbacks along the way

"Stay strong," she said. Valedictorian Larwren Terry thanked Moss Point teachers for going beyond the call of duty, taking time from their families to give students extra help after school and "listening to our complaints."

"Each of us will travel on our own path, making a great life or not," she said. "It's our choice."

The bleachers were full and more than 100 spectators lined the fence and stood in the parking area. The program announced the 143 graduates had garnered a total of \$1.6 million in scholarships.

Moss Point High School

Class size: 143
Valedictorian: Larwren Terry, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Melvin and Valerie Terry
Salutatorian: Shawneice Elexis Lynn White, daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Allen and Lynn Powell
Principal: Jeff Mumford
Class motto: "History will be kind to us, for we intend to write it."

As the assistant principal read off each name, some danced across the grass to receive their diplomas.

The first few times, the principal shot a frown of disapproval their way, but it was too late for that. He had lost his sway.

They are grown and on their way.

ST. PATRICK HIGH SCHOOL

Graduates dive into new phase

By **TAMMY SMITH**
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BILOXI — Sixty-eight students filed into the gymnasium of St. Patrick Catholic High School on Friday to receive their diplomas, say goodbye to teachers and transform from students to alumni with the turning of their tassels, as class president Elizabeth Veale noted.

Most Rev. Roger P. Morin, bishop of Biloxi and principal celebrant, said, "One can feel the electricity and anticipation for the moment of graduation." He compared the moment to standing on a diving board.

"Each of you is standing at the end of the high board, testing its tension" before moving forward to make a "big splash," he said. "This is a very significant, new beginning for each and every one of you."

Valedictorian Grant Kalil quoted advice from hotel magnate Conrad Hilton



Kalil Alexander

and computer entrepreneur Steve Jobs in his speech, but he also touched on the subject of fear.

"We do not know what our future holds for us. All we can do is put our faith and trust in God's hands," he said. "The phrase 'Do not be afraid' is written in the Bible 365 times. That is a daily reminder from God to live every day being fearless."

Salutatorian Stephen Alexander was inspired by the words of a beloved author.

"The most important thing I've learned at St. Patrick isn't a mathematical equation or a scientific theory or even how to write in MLA format. It's to cherish the time you have with the people you love, be-

St. Patrick Catholic High School

Valedictorian: Grant Kalil of Gulfport
Salutatorian: Stephen Alexander of Ocean Springs
Class size: 68
Principal: Renee McDaniel
Quote: "I cannot think of any other group of people I would rather have gone through all of this with, the good and the bad."
 — Valedictorian Grant Kalil

cause you don't know when they'll be leaving you. I'm going to miss you all so much next year, and I can't thank God enough that I had the pleasure of knowing every one of you. Dr. Seuss said it best: 'Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened.'

"Thank you all for the wonderful memories, and God bless."

VANCLEAVE HIGH

Grads take first step into adulthood

By **BRIAN LAMAR**
 Special to the Sun Herald

BILOXI — As 155 Vancleave High School seniors crossed the stage and during a graduation ceremony at the Coast Coliseum on Friday night, some believed this would be their first steps into adulthood.

The class — more than one third of whom graduated with special honors — held their heads high while crossing the stage to accept their high school diplomas.

"I am excited that I have passed this milestone to become a more independent person when I go off to college," said salutatorian Azeem Khan, who plans to study biomedical sciences at the University of South Alabama.

Todd Knight, the assis-

Vancleave High School

Class size: 155
Valedictorian: Kendra Cole, daughter of Ursula and Wes Cole
Salutatorian: Azeem Khan, son of Talat and Uzma Khan
Principal: Anthony Gruich
Historian: Ellen Cannon
Quote: "It's bittersweet because we are all going our separate ways, but sweet because we get to make new memories."
 — Valedictorian Kendra Cole



BRIAN LAMAR/SPECIAL TO THE SUN HERALD
The class of 2015 prepares to receive their diplomas during Vancleave High School's graduation ceremony at the Coast Coliseum in Biloxi on Friday.

tant superintendent for Jackson County, welcomed the soon-to-be graduates with a bit of encouragement to do

the right thing in the face of adversity.

"Tomorrow, you will begin a journey on a new road of your choosing ... you will be faced with challenges," he said. "I encourage you to always do what's right when faced with challenges."

Although the most attention was focused on the grad-

uates, one student recognized the teaching staff.

"The parents and teachers are the real MVPs of tonight and they deserve the biggest round of applause," said valedictorian Kendra Cole, who plans to study information technology at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Other speeches from student body members were rife with Snapchats, selfies, Dr. Seuss quotes and words of wisdom.

"On the pathway to success, we will always be faced with roadblocks large and small ... if you run into a wall, don't stop, find a way through it whether you climb over it, or run through it," Khan said. "The only thing holding you back is your doubt. Don't listen to it; you have everything you need to succeed."