

# uEd up for Education

*People and programs impacting our QCSD community*

June 16, 2020

## COVID can't rain on this parade



### Community celebrates Class of 2020





# Class of 2020 has incredible story to tell

By Gary Weckselblatt

A senior class that lost three months of school socializing, a season of sports, its prom, plays and musical performances received a celebratory sendoff limited only by COVID-19 pandemic guidelines.

*“This virus has taught me so much, and I truly think we’ve all learned some lifelong lessons from it. We know we aren’t alone. The feeling of unity that has come from the loss of so many important things is a feeling that I guarantee no other class has ever felt. We feel that unity here, across the nation, and throughout the world. Through these hardships, we were able to find comfort in our loved ones, and the support of those people has brought us this far.”*

**Nolan Hibsman, Class President**

With brilliant weather that matched the collective disposition of these 418 seniors, Quakertown Community High School held a special parade to show its appreciation for the Class of 2020 on Tuesday, June 16th.

*“This pandemic allowed us to spend time with our families before we head off to college, enter the workforce, or join the military. And I’m not saying there is no such thing as too much time with family because there is, especially with little siblings. But, instead of only looking at the negatives of this situation I urge you all to try and think positive.”*

**Shawn Newswanger, Class Vice President**

Principal Mattias Van’t Hoenderdaal and his administrative team met several times with student leaders to develop a plan that gave this class that lost so much a positive memory as they take the next step in their life’s journey.

*“We will undoubtedly be telling our children of our ill-fated senior years, yet we will also recount the unprecedented celebration we had as a class and, more importantly, the rebirth we saw in the world as if we witnessed a New Renaissance. Changes are coming, so we must prepare mentally and comprehend the monument*



*“If it weren’t for the support of my family, teachers, administrators, and friends, I don’t know how I would’ve made it through these last few months, and especially the last four years. They were there every step of the way, and have helped me become the person I am today.”*

**Nolan Hibsman, Class President**

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# I am calling on you to take action right now

*With the recent deaths of black Americans leading to protests across this country, Quakertown Community High School 2020 graduate Jollyfisher J Ekpe, a scholar, musician and athlete, was asked to write about his experiences in QCSD and the community. Here is his story.*

**By Jollyfisher J Ekpe**

When I look back on my four years at Quakertown Community High School, all I can say is that I am thankful.

QCCHS is so unique; not many other high schools in this state compare to it. The bottom line is this: we have outstanding students. There is an unprecedented unity of academics, arts, and athletics in our school. We are nationally recognized for our AP programs and several of our top tier athletics. We are regionally recognized for our choral and symphonic excellence. Prestige and advanced comprehension follow our students wherever they go. How is it, then, that the scheme of racism- something so rudimentary and primitive in its nature- keeps rearing its nasty head in our community?

We know that we are not born with hatred in our hearts. Hatred and partiality are learned as we take in information from our families, our communities, and our surroundings. No matter what information we learned through observation or teaching, to believe that life means more because of the color of one's skin at this point is foolish and ignorant. We, as the human race, have come just too far to be looking back and arguing on the sanctity of life. So, I accepted being included in this work to talk about these things. I wanted to give the people of



**"We've been chosen by fate to transform the world in front of us for the better."**

**Jake Berton, Class Officer**



**Jollyfisher J Ekpe will be attending Azusa Pacific University to major in Acting for Stage and Screen with a minor in Screenwriting.**

my soon to be alma mater one final imploration to not only be better but to do better: by standing up and using their proud voices to highlight and eradicate racism and partiality in our nation. It starts at home, and it starts with you.

What I have personally experienced in Quakertown is not necessarily ignorance or apathy on the topic of racism. It has almost been an avoidance of the conversation. It seems like the only time the talk of equality was pushed throughout the high school (and the district at large) was after incidents had occurred- such as kids shouting the n-word in the cafeteria or rocks being thrown at school buses. That, or the honorable month of February- where specific focus was brought to African American heritage. That is not enough. We as a community **MUST** make this a common and casual conversation.

How so? Well, I submit to you the strides educators took to eradicate many forms of physical bullying in schools. From a very young age- 2nd or 3rd grade- I remember the groups that my elementary school brought in to reinforce how terrible bullying was. They had substantive videos, interactive assemblies, and other innovative ways to share the realities of the victim, the bystander, and even the bully! It got to the point where if students saw bullying on the playground, they would almost forget about the bully's target because they were too concerned with

comforting the bully through any of the home-hardships or troubles they were going through!

I share this to say that we will not solve this problem in a day. It will require hard work and a universal effort to begin teaching the younger generation how wrong it is to judge someone based on the amount of melanin they have in their skin. We as a community and as a nation need to reread and reinforce our very own Constitution- especially the part where it says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness " (U.S. 1776).

Quakertown Community. I am calling upon you to take action **RIGHT NOW**. Educate yourselves and your families on every facet of bias both historically and currently. Read the phenomenal pieces of literature that illustrate racial realities (Nelson Mandela, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Understanding and Dismantling Racism, etc.). Be in contact with district, county, and state representatives and let them know when things are not the way they should be. Bring attention to areas that need it by speaking up. Fight for justice in every way possible. Help this district to be safe and cultivating for every ethnicity.

Help it to be a home for the only race that matters- the human race. Perhaps above all, make it a community that you are proud to live in.



**"To every single graduate who is a part of the black community, I want you to know I am holding you even closer to my heart as you navigate these unspeakable recent tragedies that occurred during this already difficult time. I honor you specifically today. My awe and respect for your resilience grows greater and greater every single day."**

**Brenda Sharp, Class Advisor**



## Class of 2020

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*tal events around us. The future is ours to mold and shape."*

**Jake Berton, Class Officer-Public Relations**

Mr. V and high school administrators delivered graduation caps and gowns by fire truck and school buses to student's residences. During the first week of June, video production teacher Lincoln Kaar staged and filmed the Class of 2020 graduation ceremony - one graduate at a time. It was a lengthy filming process that included all components of a graduation ceremony, including student, class sponsor, principal and School Board president speeches. The link to view Graduation 2020 has been placed on the QCSO.org website.

*"Because of this virus I have seen the community come together to support us seniors, in these unsettling times. And for that, I am forever grateful. Also, I am thankful to all the teachers and staff at Quakertown who helped lift our spirits whether it was just sending a simple email to see how we were all doing or putting together a video to cheer us up. But most of all I would like to thank my family for putting up with me while I'm locked inside their house with nothing better to do than annoy them and ask complex questions like where's the remote and if almond butter is real."*

**Elliot Uhrich, Class Secretary**

So even though the pandemic prevented the walk across the big stage at Stabler Arena with its huge screen, the Class of 2020 was part of a motorcade led by Quakertown Borough Police and, hopefully, heard their names announced as two screens along Park Ave. flashed their graduation photos.

*"As a result of this ongoing pandemic, the conclusion to our senior year came by so fast, and with this we must keep going. Keep fighting for what we believe in. Keep pushing for progress. Keep moving to the next challenge. We just have to keep on rolling. No matter what life throws your way, you can look back at what we've come through as a class, and figure it out."*

**Barrett Reiss, Class Treasurer**

Classroom teachers, who quickly transformed to online educators for three months, took their places along the motorcade route and waved to students and families. Borough residents also lined parts of Park Ave. and Juniper Street in addition to Fifth and Eleventh Streets while the administration and School Board members had socially distanced seating in front of the high school. As Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner said in a recent blog, "The QCHS Class of 2020 will have an incredible story to share for generations to come!"

*"Regardless of the ways your lives have been affected, you have endured with resilience and here you are today. You are amazing!"*

**Brenda Sharp, Class Advisor**



**"I am thankful to all the teachers and staff at Quakertown who helped lift our spirits whether it was just sending a simple email to see how we were all doing or putting together a video to cheer us up."**

**Elliot Uhrich, Class Secretary**

Early feedback from the community has been awesome. They loved the parade! Many suggested making it a new tradition. Hmmm.

Gary Weckselblatt, QCSD Director of Communications, writes about the people and the programs that impact the Quakertown Community School District. He can be reached at [gweckselblatt@qcsd.org](mailto:gweckselblatt@qcsd.org).



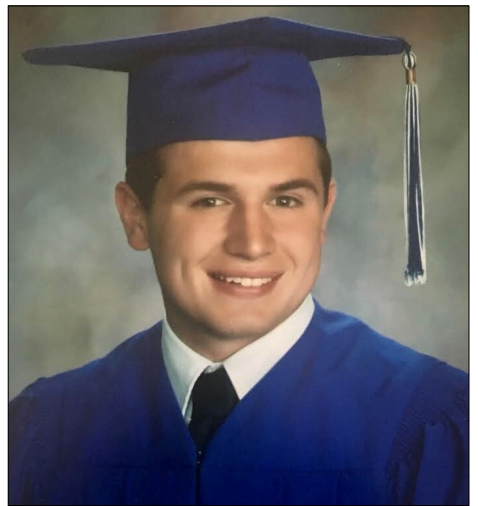
**"I can tell you all right now that one day what happened during this time will be in history books, not only in the United States but across the world. It's crazy because everyone in the world is going through the same struggle, and that doesn't happen often. We will be able to tell our kids that Lebron James hosted a virtual graduation for us and that Barack Obama gave our commencement speech. It is memories like these that will forever connect us as a class, and memories that we will never forget."**

**Shawn Newswanger, Class Vice President**



**"Graduates, you will not forget this moment in history and it will be "the year you graduated during a pandemic." This experience will build the muscle you need to dust yourself off and keep moving forward. Use it to be determined, persistent, and unstoppable in designing the future of your dreams."**

**Kaylyn Mitchell, School Board President**



**"As a result of this ongoing pandemic, the conclusion to our senior year came by so fast, and with this we must keep going. Keep fighting for what we believe in. Keep pushing for progress. Keep moving to the next challenge. We just have to keep on rolling. No matter what life throws your way, you can look back at what we've come through as a class, and figure it out."**

**Barrett Reiss, Class Treasurer**



**"Never underestimate the power of relationships. It is always people who will make a difference in your life, and in the same way you can make a difference for them."**

**"But just as you need them, they will need you as well. Be quick to help someone in need, and join them in their celebrations and**

**achievements. Thank the people around you for their support. Be there for them when they need you. In doing so, you will most certainly make a difference in the lives of others and you will have reached success. And in doing so, we will have achieved our mission as a school."**

**Mattias Van't Hoenderdaal, QCHS Principal**

