Congratulations!

GRADS

2023

A special publication of the Addison Independent • June 2023
YOUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT
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Congratulations to the Class of 2023 from our family to yours. We wish you success in all your future endeavors.
MUHS grad excelled at balancing two cultures

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — Camila Blanco called herself a “typical nervous freshman” when she first crossed the threshold of Middlebury Union High School four years ago.

“I was trying to figure out where I belonged, who my friends were, figuring out classes, teachers and getting used to the whole high school experience,” the newly minted 2023 graduate recalled during a recent interview.

But Blanco’s perseverance and accomplishments would become anything but typical.

Now 18, Blanco carried — and continues to carry — the hopes and dreams of her parents, who were among the first Central American couples to emigrate to Vermont as part of a migrant worker phenomenon that has raised incoming families out of poverty, while providing critical labor for the state’s dairy farms.

Blanco — an only child — will soon become the first generation of her family to attend college. She’ll be entering Tufts University this fall en route to what she hopes will be a career as a lawyer.

Her matriculation to Tufts has been well-earned not only through hard work in the classroom, but also through good deeds in the community.

She’s served as a volunteer receptionist at the Open Door Clinic, which offers free health care to uninsured and underinsured people — including virtually all of the county’s migrant worker population.

Blanco has one foot in the classroom, the other in the local Latin community, where she’s become a much-valued translator and the embodiment of the American Dream for a population that continues to see the U.S. as the land of opportunity.

“It’s fun and it’s difficult to navigate these two different worlds, to memorize the customs of the two worlds, the languages, the different people,” she explained. “It’s interesting to see, to be a part of, and to have grown up in, two different worlds.

“The green, white and red, and the red, white and blue — it’s interesting to juxtapose and realize there are different things,” she said.

Blanco has been a veritable “triple-threat” at MUHS. In addition to having been a great student, she’s been an accomplished violinist (a Vermont youth regular who’s been playing since she was three) and a seasoned actor-singer in the MUHS musicals.

“Music has always been a tender refuge for her — particularly during the quarantine days of COVID.

“During my freshman year, I was doing a lot of violin,” she said. “It’s how I entertained myself. I love music; it’s my number-one hobby and passion.”

Members of the class of 2023 had the dubious distinction of having to deal with COVID restrictions during the first three of their four years at MUHS. The pandemic hit during March of 2020, just as they had become established in their high school routines. The ensuing few years brought remote learning, a hybrid

(See MUHS on Page 4)
MUHS

(Continued from Page 3)

schedule and seemingly endless masking and social distancing.
Like other members of her class, Blanco justifiably feels the pandemic robbed her of a “conventional” high school experience.

“Yes, I do feel cheated,” she said candidly. “I grew up expecting… to go to football and basketball games with friends, go to the assemblies and pep rallies. We sort of didn’t get that until this year. I sort of expected — almost all the way up through middle school — for my high school years to be something out of ‘High School Musical.’”

But she’s happy she did get a happy high school ending and acknowledges that “no one could have seen (the pandemic) coming.”

Blanco had the extra challenge of blending into a school population that’s not as racially or ethnically diverse as in other parts of the country. She recalled being the only student of color during some of her elementary years at Salisbury Community School, a situation that fortunately changed somewhat as she got into high school.

“It definitely wasn’t easy, but it was interesting,” she said.

‘EXTRA SUPPORT SYSTEM’
Blanco helped create a BIPOC Affinity Space at MUHS, a place where students of color can periodically go to associate, support each other, and share common stories. It’s a space that will be part of Blanco’s legacy at MUHS.

“If anything, it sort of builds community, makes you realize you’re not alone,” she said. “It’s an extra support system.”

And while many of her classmates came from more affluent homes with parents who could help them navigate the college-application process, Blanco had to become the primary author of her own success.

“I definitely had to fend for myself more. I talked to teachers and needed more help,” she said. “If anything, I’ve learned to advocate for myself more.”

That said, her parents are among her top role models.

“They’ve always advocated for me, loved me, taken care of me and done everything they could for me,” she said. “My parents always told me, ‘You need to go to college, you need to study, put your nose to the grindstone and work hard, because that’s what we came here to do.’”

Words of wisdom that Blanco has taken seriously — and she hopes they will resonate with future emigrant children. She realizes she’s one of the first homegrown Mexican American students to graduate high school here and move on to college.

“It’s nice to help create that pathway for future, young Mexican American kids growing up here in Addison County,” she said.

“It’s interesting to see, to be a part of, and to have grown up in, two different worlds.”
— Camila Blanco

Congratulations to all of the 2023 Graduates and especially to our current and former team members!
Scout creates outdoor classroom in Monkton

MONKTON — Spending time outdoors wasn’t just nice during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a safety measure many schools took seriously. To facilitate that need, Gold Award Girl Scout Patricia McNerney created an outdoor classroom at Monkton Central School, clearing and leveling a wooded area behind the school as well as building tables, desks, stools and a storage shed.

McNerney, 18, of Monkton, earned Girl Scouting’s highest honor with her project, Outdoor Classroom, the capstone to her Girl Scout experience. She graduated from Mount Abraham Union High School on June 10.

The pandemic did not make the classroom completion simple. Her contacts at the school left during her project, and she initially had to direct work while keeping her team safely distanced. With many extracurriculars, McNerney’s schedule was full, but she found ways to block out time for her project and picked up some woodworking skills so she wasn’t so reliant on others to build the planned components.

“In Girl Scouts, I was a little familiar with woodworking,” she said. “I used power tools a few years ago. My leader actually has a workshop that she let me borrow the stuff from, to build. I had a lot of help learning to use power tools. Like, I never used a router before, so that was interesting.”

McNerney got creative.

“There were some stumps from the trees I cut down that I sanded down to make into seating. Some of the stumps that were left on the site I turned into tables,” she said. Convincing Monkton Central School to allow the project was easy, she said.

“My mentor was at the school and she had actually been asking for something like this for a while,” McNerney said. “And she had a few friends that were also teachers who also wanted to use it, already. I think with COVID everyone was ready to switch things up in the classroom. So it was actually pretty easy to convince them to use it. They’ve been using it on a weekly basis. I’ve seen some of their Facebook posts about the kids playing. I think people were ready for a change, so they welcomed it.”

McNerney spent 104 hours and $642.62 on the outdoor classroom, much of that earned through bottle drives and a bake sale.

The three-year-long project was a lesson in perseverance.

“My mom was definitely a big help motivating me!” she said. “I have to give her credit. I really wanted to finish, definitely before I headed to school.”

McNerney has enjoyed backpacking, trips, and more during her years in Girl Scouts. She recalled that even when unexpected things happened on trips, such as a thunderstorm when they were supposed to camp out, her troop learned to push through and make the best of things. She said the Girl Scout Cookie program went well, and that making it a competition between girls in her troop really helped.

During her high school years, McNerney was captain of her soccer and softball teams, a National Merit Scholarship finalist, and a Presidential Scholar nominee. She said she is excited to attend Hamilton College in New York in the fall.

MOVING UP

FIVE ADDISON COUNTY residents participated in Rice Memorial High School’s annual graduation ceremony on Saturday, June 3, in South Burlington. They include Miles Grant, left, Vergennes; Makayla Carpentier-Perry, Starksboro; Shea McLaren, North Ferrisburgh; Sydney Adreon, Vergennes; and Samuel Crawford, Ferrisburgh.

Photo courtesy of Rice Memorial High School
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Graduation 2023 • The Addison Independent • June 2023

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Maya Huestis
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WILD SIDE

EVERY YEAR THE senior class at Middlebury Union High School stages a musical in the spring — no previous acting experience or musical talent is required. Fortunately, director Shannon Bohler found the Class of 2023 was “super talented and very funny!” Here are some seniors stretching their acting chops by playing penguins who have hijacked a boat in this spring’s production of “Madagascar.”

Independent photo/Steve James
Congratulations, Class of 2023!

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Vergennes grads form a cohesive whole

By AMELIA SEEPERSAUD

VERGENNES — The Vergennes Union High School Class of 2023 included people who were different in many ways. But the young women and young men who marched across the stage at the June 9 graduation found ways to form a cohesive whole.

Part of that was their shared experiences in the pandemic, but each individual had their own story to tell.

Bee Eckels and Peyton Paquette were part of the diverse community who shared their stories.

BEE ECKELS

For Eckels, high school was a time of new experiences. She started dancing in 9th grade when she participated in the school musical. In the last four years she has learned tap and jazz and in the last two, ballet.

“It was fun because I hadn’t grown up doing dance,” she shared.

She was also a member of the National Honors Society during her time in high school and in her final year she took on the position of vice president. She was also a member of the VUHS Student Senate, a role in which she played a part in the planning of school events like prom, the senior walkathon, project grad (an event that happens the night after graduation as a last hurrah for the graduating class), etc.

Eckels said she got a lot out of her high school experience.

“I’ve always been someone who’s liked school,” she said. “I would describe it as fun. The classes I took were fun. I got classes I wanted every year with teachers I liked. I wish there were more AP classes but Vergennes is a small school so I understand how that’s not always possible. There’s something for everyone. I think Vergennes does a good job at keeping everyone engaged.”

She particularly enjoyed her humanities classes like AP Literature, as she is hoping to study English at Boston’s Simmons University, where she is heading in the fall.

“I really enjoyed AP Lit, which I was really scared of going into,” Eckels recalled. “Mr. Thomas is a really good English teacher. We did a lot of poetry analysis, which I never really did before. He taught us how to read ‘Pride and Prejudice’ in a way that was really hilarious.”

Outside of school Eckels likes to read and cross country ski with her family. But her absolute favorite thing to do, both inside and outside of school is swimming. One of the things she is most looking forward to as she enters the next chapter of her life is joining Simmons University’s swim team.

PEYTON PAQUETTE

For Paquette, high school was also a time of expanding horizons, but in a different direction. He was very involved in his school community at VUHS. He played baseball every year as a pitcher and an outfielder, he was a member of the National Honors Society, and a member of the student government. Student government along with some college courses he took in world history and political science is what piqued Paquette’s interest in studying Political Science at the University of Vermont in the fall.

Paquette said the interest that was most important and integral to his high school experience was music. He was a part of both the select and regular choir all four years, participated in the school musical every year except for his sophomore year due to COVID-19. He learned to play the guitar and piano, and he even took vocal lessons for a couple of years.

Music wasn’t just a hobby for him, it became a passion during high school especially in the wake of the pandemic.

“Before high school I didn’t really have a passion for music,” he said. “But during that time I could always rely on my music to push me through.”

One of the most valuable lessons Paquette has taken away from high school is the importance of acceptance.

“Everyone will think different things, but what really matters is being able to accept yourself for who you really are.”

— Peyton Paquette

“Everyone will think different things, but what really matters is being able to accept yourself for who you really are.”

— Peyton Paquette
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Zeke Joshua Dubois  Elijah Duprey  Frances Beulah Eckels  Jonathan Charles Elder  Abram Bryce Francis  David French
VUHS

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However, both Eckels and Paquette along with the rest of the VUHS community came out the other end of it, with classes back to normal operation — mostly — by the middle of the class of 2023’s junior year. Despite the disconnect the two graduates faced during the early days of their high school experience, when asked about their class, the moments they both hold onto the most are the ones that they felt most connected to their school community.

“We all got along pretty well I think,” Eckels said. “I noticed especially over this year as we got closer to graduation, people in other groups got nicer to other people. People in the halls that I never spoke to before would say, ‘Hi, Bee.’ That was really cool to watch, how we came together.”

Paquette had his own way of explaining the way his class came together.

“I would say we’re a very diverse class when it comes to personality and interest,” he said. “Overall our class has a sense of general respect for one another. We all have a shared experience. Sometimes there are some outliers who will be against certain things and certain people. And our class has always stood up to that and stayed strong in face of adversity. Our class has always been very determined.”

He believes that their class has grown to become more accepting of one another over the years.

With their high school career coming to a close, Eckels and Paquette are both heading off to the next phase of their lives looking forward to the new experiences that await them at their respective universities in the fall.

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Madison Perkins  
Kassidy Elizabeth Quinlan
Lesson from an MAUHS grad: High school is what you make it

By MARIN HOWELL

BRISTOL — A lot of learning can take place inside a classroom. Quizzes, lectures and math lessons all have things to teach us.

But looking back on her time at Mount Abraham Union High School, 2023 graduate Lily James Roberts said there was a lot she learned from experiences that didn’t take place at a desk or require a pencil and paper.

Over the past four years, Roberts has explored her passion for performing arts through classes at the Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center, pursuing extracurricular activities and pushing herself to produce original music during the pandemic.

She said these experiences have taught her valuable lessons and important skills, and she encourages younger kids still in high school to seek out similar opportunities.

“Whether it’s in school or out of school, having something that you really love to do that isn’t just work is good for anyone and everyone to have,” Roberts said. “Whether it’s music or playing basketball or community service, having something like that, I found, has always motivated me to continue growing and continue learning about the things that I really enjoy.”

high school highlights

For Roberts, those labors of love have largely played out on stage. She’s taken part in many musicals at Mount Abe, playing Janis in “Mean Girls” this past spring and Dolly Levi in the school’s production of “Hello Dolly” in her senior fall.

Roberts said these musicals are some of the most rewarding activities she’s been a part of in high school.

“We have a ton of community support and it’s honestly just as big as our big sports playoffs at the school. Everyone comes out to support the kids and because of that, we’ve been able to have a really high caliber of performing arts at the school. I’ve always loved being a part of that,” she said.

The recent high school graduate said taking part in musicals has also helped prepare her for a career in the performing arts and taught her valuable skills.

“It really creates a strong community. You have adults that you can go to, friends, there’s a real leadership component to it that I’ve always loved,” Roberts said. “It’s very rewarding and it’s also taught me a lot about how to be a good leader and look out for my friends as well.”

Another highlight from her high school career has been participating in the Vermont Young Playwrights program, which allows participating students to work with a professional playwright to learn about the practice. The program serves as many as 29 schools throughout the state, including Mount Abe and the Hannaford Career Center.

“(The program) allows kids to work with a professional playwright, kind of dip their toes into what being a writer for television or film or for the stage might be like. It’s an opportunity you won’t find in the classroom or in a traditional musical theater education setting,” Roberts said.

During her senior year, Roberts participated in the career center’s Addison Repertory Theatre. The program gives students the chance to dive into various elements of running a theater company, from production to performances and management. A favorite memory from her time...
Lessons

(Continued from Page 20)

in the A.R.T. program is getting to work with fellow students to write, produce and perform a 90-minute original play.

Students shared the fruits of their efforts, a gothic-style ghost story titled “A Shadow on the Wall,” with the community this past February.

“We’re seeing about getting it copyrighted now and published so that other communities in Vermont can pursue it,” Roberts said. “We think it’s a really cool story and it’s even cooler that a bunch of students were able to write it.”

Roberts said the career center has a lot to offer students, whether they’re interested in A.R.T. or another area of study.

“I think the Hannaford Career Center is a huge resource for any high school student in the surrounding area,” she said. “Anything there is a huge, huge boost for anyone that wants to take it.”

pandemic creations

After years of adhering to various COVID-related restrictions, Roberts has enjoyed getting to experience many mask-free moments on and off stage this school year. She noted that the pandemic has had a profound impact on her and her peers.

“Of course, we had to wear masks and practice social distancing and those were challenging in their own right, but there was also a time when everyone felt very separated socially and emotionally,” she recalled. “There was a lot of waiting, on the part of my classmates, waiting to get that normal high school experience.”

While in-person performances took an extended intermission during the pandemic, Roberts continued to explore creative outlets throughout quarantine. In 2021, she released an album of original music titled “The Brazen,” which is available on all streaming platforms.

Roberts said writing music allowed her to express a desire for social connection during a period of isolation.

“I wanted to be out with my friends experiencing these things and that wasn’t an option,” she said. “Going to dances, having your first kiss, being present and close to other people was very taboo for a time so I saw a need for young people’s voices to be in the conversation of what was going on and I felt the best way to do that was to begin writing music.”

eyes on the future

Whether performing on stage or producing original music, Roberts has found that she’s grown a lot throughout the past four years. She noted that she’s not alone in that, as her peers have also begun to find their sense of self amidst a radically changing world.

“When the Hannaford Career Center is a huge resource for students, waiting to get that normal high school experience.”

She noted that taking advantage of new opportunities can be daunting, but also rewarding.

“High school is really what you make of it and if anyone is going into their freshman year nervous and a little afraid, then they can know that that’s where everyone is in their freshman year. Breaking out of those nerves and trying to have new experiences and new things is going to make your high school experience so much greater,” Roberts said.

The graduate will once again find herself a freshman this fall, when she begins studying at The New School in New York City. Roberts will be pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the university’s performing arts program.

She said she is looking forward to all of the opportunities that await her in the Big Apple.

“Being able to be in New York City is one of the things I’m most excited about. It’s an education in and of itself to live there. I think opportunity and experiences are some of life’s greatest teachers and I’m going somewhere where both of those things are plentiful,” Roberts said.

“Everyone comes out to support the kids and because of that, we’ve been able to have a really high caliber of performing arts at (Mount Abe).”

— Lily James Roberts
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Congratulations to the faculty, staff and administrators who helped these kids along - you are also appreciated

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The Mt. Abraham Class of 2023
We know you will flourish and achieve in the future!

Natalie Brie Adams • Sydney M Adkins • Sadie Jane Alderman • Lucas Allen • Jenesis A Artis • Madison R Aube • Lauren E Audy • Gavin O’Reilly Bedard Bannister • Morgan Barnes • Norman Benoit • Keleigh Ann Boise • Mariah Lynn Brace • Lea M Bradtmuller • Bailey A Brinkman • Benjamin Francis Brown • Nala Lynn Bushee • Olivia Rose Campbell • Shannon Catella • Abbie M Clark • Hunter M Collins • Matthew Conant • Levi Connel • Emily M Cousins • Isabella R. Currier • Sean Chapman Davison • Domenic S DeNapoli • Chance Ryan Denecker • Jason R Doyle • Ty M Duell • Heather Dwire • Graycen Hadley Elkins • Hannah F Emmons • Kierra Nerice Fay • Brighton Camden Fuller • Madison Benoit Gile • Briquette Morales Giron • Trinity Gonyo • Lucas Edward Grover • Cassandra Marie Guillemette • Lilith Gunn • Nathaniel Gustin • Jordan R Hall • Ruby Jean Hall • Aidan Harris • Devan G Hemingway • Reiss C Hendee • Agustus Scott Hill • Maisy Grace Hill • William Iliff • Sadie Elizabeth James • Celeste Rylé • Jedlick Paolantonio • Maia Lorenz Jensen • Owen Kelliher • Noah Kirshenbaum • Brogan M Kittell • Trever Kunze • Logan Ladeau • Gabrielle E LaFreniere • Abbie Ciera Landon • Dakota P Larocque • Ryan P Lathbury • Gabriel T Lavallee • Dustin Rayburn Lavigne • Andrew William Lester • Colby S Little • Elias D Logan • Gerardo Lopez • Jake F Lucarelli • John D Lucia • Ryan Parker Marcotullio • Benjamin Thomas Marcum • Kayden J. Matis • Addison Marlies Mayhew • Eve Catherine McCormick • Patricia Anne Mcinerney • Kenneth R Morin • Evan Oberle • Kasandra Ivette Otero • Brenden R Oxford • Clara Palmer • Trent Paquette • Lucy Parker • Angelita C Peña • Logan Nicholas Pierro • Malory Rose Pixley • Breanne Nadine Preston • Eliza Rose Preston • Tierney Leigh Prunoncha • Tristan James Pudvah • Owen Justin Reynolds • Lily James Roberts • Isabella P Robideau • Caleb B Russell • Mikalah Elizabeth Russell • Sawyer S Shepard • Silas George Shepard • Joshua Sherman • Vivian Margaret Siegfried • Abigail Rita Sturtevant • Taylor Tanner • Sam JH Tropp • Nolan Valkyrie • Jacob Villena • Payton Sue Vincent • Bradley Wells

Congratulations to the faculty, staff and administrators who helped these kids along - you are also appreciated

SOAR EAGLES SOAR!
BRANDON — Otter Valley Union High School graduated 87 young people in the Class of 2023, each of whom has special qualities they use to make contributions to their community.

Two members of the class were recognized for their excellence in academics: the valedictorian, who achieved the highest grade point average during her four years, and the salutatorian, who had the second-highest.

Emily Peduto of Brandon, daughter of Anthony and Donna Peduto, is this year’s valedictorian. Abigail Adamsen of Pittsford, son of Keith and Lisa Adamsen, is the salutatorian.

Emily Peduto is a member of the National Honor Society and has excelled in a variety of challenging classes at Otter Valley, earning an overall GPA of 101.89.

During her time at Otter Valley, Emily was the recipient of the Rensselaer Medal for achievement in mathematics and science, the Society of Women Engineers Award for high honors in science and mathematics, and the Bausch and Lomb Honorary Science Award for outstanding achievement in the science field. She is also the recipient of the Otter Valley Science Department’s 4-year award.

Emily has excelled in rigorous courses including AP Biology, AP Literature, Calculus, AP Chemistry and AP World History.

In addition to her excellent work in the classroom, Emily has been a 4-year member and 2-year captain for the varsity soccer team, and a 3-year member of the varsity basketball team. Emily has also engaged in extensive volunteer work with Homeward Bound, the Addison County Humane Society. Emily will attend the University of Montana to pursue a career in veterinary medicine.

Abigail Adamsen is also a member of the National Honor Society and has demonstrated excellence in the areas of leadership, service, and scholarship during her time at Otter Valley. She has taken and excelled in a variety of rigorous courses, including AP Literature, AP Physics, AP World History and Calculus.

A recipient of honors from the Society of Women Engineers, Abigail has also received the Clarkson University Leadership Award, and recently got accolades from the Otter Valley mathematics department as the recipient of the department’s 4-year award.

Abigail has also extensively worked with young people in our community, including serving as a program assistant for Lothrop Elementary School’s afterschool program, a camp counselor with Pittsford Rec, and a middle school student mentor at Otter Valley.

Abigail will be attending the University of Vermont, where she intends to major in public communications.
Congratulations Class of 2023

Benjamin Henry Adams
Kelsey Danielle Adams
Abigail G. Adamsen
Devin Robert Anderson
Tucker J. Babcock
Jordan Robert Beayon
Brooke Taylor Bertrand
Bryn Ann Blanchard
Caleb Randall Blanchard
Dylan Joseph Brown
Matthew E. Bryant
Ella Mae Brytowski
Keith Jonathon Carrara
John A. Coleman
Colton W. Cone

CONGRATS OTTERS!

Good Luck to All of Our 2023 Graduates!

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Congratulations Class of 2023
Benjamin M. Lufkin
Kendra M. Mallette
Kiley Kathleen Martin
Andrew Gabriel McEnerny
Mackenzie Elizabeth McKay
Alyssa Jordan McRae

Jared Bowman Mills
Olivia Louise Miner
Vera Irene Moncrief
Joseph Gerard Muha Jr.
Cadence Elizabeth Muth
Harley Danger Neilson

Eliza M. Norford
Grace Anne Evangeline O’Connell
Lillian D. O’Connor
Cody T. Pariseau
Keevon Le’nard Parks
Gavin John Parry

Emily R. Peduto
Jonathan Lawrence Pickett
Elena Diane Politano
Thomas James Politano
Jacob D. Posner
Chyanna Post

Gary Post
Derek L. Raymond
Ryden Keith Richardson
Alivia Marie Sheldrick
Malachi Gabriel Sheldrick
Andrew Silber
The following Orwell residents graduated from Fair Haven Union High School:

- Carson Babbie
- Chicory Greene
- Alida Paige
- Hayley Porter
- Veronica Redondo
- Natalie Rockwell
- Raegan Spencer
- Taegan Washburn
- Nathaniel Young
- Samuel Young

Good work!
Congratulations
GRADS!

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From all of us at Rainbow Pediatrics,

Congratulations 2023 Graduates!

It has been our pleasure
to watch you grow.