

In our continuing series highlighting the members of the Class of 2022, this week we're focusing on the graduates from Deane Bozeman School.

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As we near graduation, many of our seniors are looking back fondly on their relationships from the past four years and great times with classmates. For 16 seniors at Deane Bozeman, this time of reflection is even more poignant as they have attended school together, continuously, for all 13 years of their K-12 education. As our only K-12 school in rural, northern Bay County, Bozeman is unique in this way and the relationships these students forge generate a close-knit, family-like atmosphere.

Principal Ivan Beach said this senior class has much to celebrate, along with the 16 original Bucks, including:

- Fifty percent of the seniors have grade point averages of 3.5 or higher
- Seven seniors have enlisted in the military
- Sixty-four percent of the seniors earned one or more Career and Technical Education industry certifications
- Collectively the class has been offered more than \$1 million in scholarships
- Five seniors received baseball scholarships

One of those seniors, Mariana Hamilton, hasn't been at Bozeman very long but she's been there long enough to recognize that this school is unique.

"BDS employees have helped me succeed," she said. "They have done everything they could to help me and work with me so I could complete everything I needed to complete. They have been supportive and there for me every step of the way."

Mariana, who works part-time after school on Bozeman's cleaning crew, said she's learned the value of determination. "If you're motivated enough, or if you want something badly enough, you can get it done but you have to give it your all," she said. "That's the lesson I've learned through all of this and I know that I couldn't have made it this far without my family or the staff at my school."

Classmate Joanna Martinez-Ramirez is also grateful for the Bozeman team. "Bozeman has been my home for so many years that my teachers and friends are more like family and this school has made me the person I am today," she said. Joanna plans to attend college to become a speech and language pathologist.

William Groves, another Bozeman graduate, is grateful for those who have served him during his time at Bozeman and he has big plans to give back after graduation. "After graduation, I am joining the Army and leaving for Basic Training on June 20th," he said. William said he'd like to thank "Chief Akins and First Sergeant Langston for mentoring me the most." JROTC, he said, "kept me motivated and put me on a great career path."

Mariana also plans to serve our country in the military. She's leaving after graduation to become a Military Police Officer and eventually hopes to become a K-9 handler.

However, those career plans would not be possible without the help she received from Bozeman's faculty and staff.

Mariana, who came to BDS two years ago, faced many challenges in her earlier life and arrived in our community without the school records that other students her age typically have.

Unfortunately, that meant she had to work twice as hard to catch up to her peers, a challenge everyone at Bozeman supported. "I worked hard to get things done and to make this happen," she said. "I worked during the summer too to get where I was supposed to be. But the important thing is that I got all of the help I needed, so I just kept working because graduation was something I wanted for myself."

Mariana credited her family and boyfriend for keeping her on track as well. Still, she said she wouldn't be walking the stage without "Mrs. Fondren, Mrs. West, Mrs. Shelton in the front office and all of my teachers, especially Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Patton, Mr. Grandy, Mrs. Bush, the Triad team, and Mrs. Monn." This team, she said, "helped me in my journey and always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself and was on the verge of giving up."

Together, these seniors have determination and do not give up in the face of adversity. They have overcome the impact of a Category 5 hurricane and the effects of a global pandemic in addition to many personal struggles and family challenges.

But, even in the face of so many obstacles, they remain resilient and humble. When asked what he wanted the community to know about him, William humbly replied, "nothing about me but the community should know that Bozeman is a BIG family and we are different from a lot of other schools because everyone is so close."

Mariana agreed.

"Schoolwork is the most important and I agree 100 percent but the environment and the people are also important," she said. "This school is full of so many supportive people. It's diverse and it's just a good environment. As soon as I stepped in those doors last year I felt welcomed, and I felt as though I belonged too."

She added, "this school is like a big family ... there's always someone you can go to for help for absolutely anything no matter what problem you're having and it's remarkable. I am truly sad to leave this place and this family behind but just like the people before me, it's time to make something greater of my life and myself."

I couldn't have said it any better myself! Congratulations graduates! We're so impressed with your accomplishments and we hope you'll stay in touch and let us know about your next adventures.