

In the Loop with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

By Jodee Riordan, Board of Education President

The pandemic has given us all an opportunity to reflect on what is most important in our lives: What can stay, what can go; How we can better help others, and how we can be really creative in doing so - given all the restrictions, and precautions we need to employ to keep everyone safe. As we as a community prioritized the need for care, and focused our creativity energies, celebrating and supporting our graduating Seniors rose to the top of the list, both last year and now. Let's focus today on celebrating the Class of 2021, as they head into their final days at Lewiston-Porter.

The Class of 2021 had both their Junior and Senior years at Lewiston-Porter dramatically altered by the pandemic. Throughout the past fifteen months, they have demonstrated incredible resilience, patience and grace. We are very grateful that as restrictions have eased, the Class of 2021 was able to return to campus five days per week, and that they will be able to have traditional graduations events this year: The Senior Prom will be held this coming Friday, June 18 at the historic Wurlitzer venue, in North Tonawanda and Graduation will take place on Friday, June 25 at Artpark. There are also new ways that the community has come together to celebrate our graduates.

A new tradition born of the pandemic is the Adopt-a-Senior project, led (this year and last) by the fabulous Christal Justiana-Riddle: Families "adopt" a Senior and put together an individualized graduation gift basket for them. The baskets are then all dropped off on the same day. Christal is the mom of twin boys, Matt and Joe, who are graduating this year. Christal, together with (the equally fabulous) Claudine Carlo, coordinated the "adoption" of all members of the Class of 2021 by 181 generous families. Delivery day was last Saturday, June 5 and the photos of joyful Seniors everywhere shows it was a success.

Heartfelt thanks to Cristal, Claudine and everyone who took part in the project – including the Lewiston Police Department, who helped deliver baskets for families unable to do so themselves. "Covid created a need in our community to show our young people that they are valued and appreciated," Cristal noted on the Lew-Port Adopt-a-Senior page. "It takes a village, and there is no better village than Lewiston Porter!!" I could not say it better myself.

In another new tradition, the Lewiston-Porter Senior Class of 2021 Parade will take place on Wednesday, June 16. Seniors have traditionally decorated their cars for Class Day, but in 2020 the quick drive from Lewiston-Porter High School to the class picnic was upgraded into a full community celebration, with a true parade complete with revelers cheering on the graduates all along the way.

The parade begins at 10:30am at LPHS, moving across campus before heading through the Villages of Youngstown and Lewiston, then returning to the High School. The Lewiston Police Department will be escorting the parade and providing traffic control for the event. Parade route is as follows:

- Parade starts at High School (10:30am), proceeding North on Creek Rd. to Rt. 93/Lockport St.
- Left on Rt 93/Lockport St. into the Village of Youngstown
- Left on Main St, proceeding down Lower River Rd. to Center St. in Lewiston
- Left on Center St., proceeding through the Village of Lewiston to Rt. 18/Creek Rd.
- North on Creek Rd. back to High School

Upon return to campus, the Class of 2021 will enjoy a grilled picnic lunch courtesy of the Lewiston Police Department at Blakeslee Field. We hope the whole community will come out to cheer on the Class of 2021!

Commencement will take place in the outdoor arena at Artpark on Friday, June 25. As this is an outdoor event, a rain date is set for Sunday, June 27. Guidelines continue to change quickly, but as of press time, Graduation is set. I will share Superintendent Paul Casseri's update on the event:

"Over the holiday recess I had the opportunity to speak with Sonia Clark, Executive Director of Artpark. As you may have read in the newspaper, the NYSDOH rules have now changed, again, for outdoor venues in terms of COVID-19 protocols and event attendance. Artpark is a New York State Park and rules are developed not only by the NYSDOH but also by New York State Parks and Recreation. As was described to me, we now have two attendance opportunities for graduation. We can separate all attendees based on whether they are vaccinated or unvaccinated. This would require a check at the gate and for individuals to show proof of vaccination. For example, I went to the Blue Jays game on Wednesday night and although my wife, my 15-year-old son and I are fully vaccinated, I had to sit in the unvaccinated section because my 10-year-old nephew is unvaccinated. Artpark would set up the venue with these two sections and then monitor protocols in each section.

The other attendance option that was described to me is the same option that Niagara University chose for its graduation ceremony, that is to treat all attendees as unvaccinated, maintain the originally planned, socially distanced, four-seat family pods and require all attendees to wear a mask. After discussion with the administrative team, we have opted for this second protocol. This will avoid any confrontation at the gate as to the vaccination status of attendees and will allow us to move forward with our original plan; graduates having four family tickets for attendance at graduation. We did learn yesterday that all attendees will be required to show proof that they have completed a health questionnaire prior to attendance. Below are the specific rules that were distributed to us from Artpark regarding the graduation ceremony. Of course, this may all change by June 25th. The High School administration will be communicating with Senior families as we move toward graduation. Stay tuned."

Artpark Covid -19 Graduation Ceremony Protocols:

- Every graduate and each guest must complete a contact tracing & health screening questionnaire. To complete the contact tracing and health screening, please text the word LEWPORT TO 234-ARTPARK (234-278-7275) within 12 hours prior to the graduation ceremony. Complete your contact information and answer the questions. Once completed by each individual, a green checkmark or a message that says 'Thank you for checking in. Enjoy the show!' Please be sure to keep this text, each person will need to show this at the gate upon arrival.
- No bags are allowed, this includes camera bags and large purses - the only exception is a small clutch wallet 4 1/2" x 5 1/2"
- Masks are required other than when eating or drinking at your seat. We ask that you please be sure to have your mask on and be socially distanced when arriving at the gate. Please arrive early and be patient, each person will need to show their ticket, confirmation that they completed the contact tracing form AND we will be temperature checking.
- The single seats in the bowl are reserved for the graduates, the remainder of the seats are general admission in groups of four.

- Individuals who have not completed the screening process, or who present at the gate with a temperature of 100.4 degrees or above, and all those individuals with them will be not be permitted entry to the event.

We appreciate Artpark, and especially Executive Director Sonia Clark, for working closely with us to create a unique graduation ceremony for the Class of 2021. We encourage everyone to closely follow guidance from Lewiston-Porter High School Principal Brad Rowles, the Class of 2021 advisors, and Superintendent Paul Casseri as we can only anticipate further changes as we get closer to the ceremony date.

The Board of Education will meet on Monday, June 14 for a work session beginning at 5:30pm with an executive session to discuss a contract extension for the Superintendent of Schools, and public session beginning by 6:00pm. Board of Education meetings are now open to public attendance and we encourage community members to join us. Covid precautions (social distancing and proper mask-wearing) are in place. To attend virtually, follow the [Link](#) posted to the Lew-Port homepage for the Zoom webinar, Passcode: Lancers.