

# CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2020

**Top:** The class of 2020 at Wheatmore High School make their way onto the school's football field during Saturday's commencement ceremony. Students, staff and guests were required to follow social distancing guidelines due to the COVID-19 virus. Many of the students wore masks that read "Class of 2020." **Bottom:** Trinity High School's Class of 2020 marches onto the football field during the procession at Saturday's commencement ceremony.

Photos by  
Laura Greene



## Seniors cap unprecedented year with graduation

BY DANIEL KENNEDY

RANDOLPH COUNTY — Deciding whether or not to walk for graduation is something members of each senior class struggle with every year. This year, the choice was just more complicated than most. Under normal circumstances, graduates must take into account their desire to see classmates one final time in a formal, school-sanctioned gathering, along with their

family's desire to see them receive their diplomas. In 2020, many Trinity and Wheatmore students had to consider the safety of themselves, their classmates and their families. Randolph County Public Health officials cautioned that attending graduation was risky, but the Randolph County Schools System Board of Education underscored the importance of having that closing ceremony. Nevertheless, that ceremony looked very different.

The differences for some schools began with their venue. Districtwide, schools took graduation outside on Saturday because social distancing guidelines would have prevented any guests from being at indoor ceremonies. According to RCSS Superintendent Stephen Gainey, the challenges left only one choice. "Sitting six feet apart for graduates, no hand shaking, no hugging," Gainey said. "I met with high school principals on the 8th of July. ... If

we could even social distance in the gyms, no guests would be able to be there." In order to satisfy state requirements and local recommendations, students, families and guests turned every high school football stadium in the county into a staging area. Bleachers were marked for social distancing, face coverings were distributed and hand sanitizer was used in mass quantities. Even then, some elected



# CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2020



Photos by Laura Greene

Kenyon Crotts, senior class vice president at Trinity High School, delivers the invocation during Saturday's commencement ceremony.



This year's Trinity High School graduates stand during the National Anthem. Students were seated six feet apart during the ceremony to meet the social distancing requirements.



**Above:** Audience members stand during the procession as the Wheatmore graduates march onto the stadium field to take their seats. **Right:** Wheatmore graduate Neva Hippert delivers the senior address during the Class of 2020 commencement exercises Saturday. Classmate Madeline Underwood also gave a speech reflecting on her time at Wheatmore.



## SENIORS

FROM PAGE A1

not to participate in the events. Randolph County Public Health officials indicate this may ultimately have been for the best. "Staying at home remains the safest option to stop the spread of COVID-19," said a news release from the department in anticipation of the July 25 graduation. "Graduation is a time to recognize seniors for their hard work and for families to celebrate this milestone. Please honor our seniors by celebrating

their accomplishments as safely as possible." With that warning, school leaders attempted to avoid a fate that befell Union County weeks ago when clusters of positive cases were reported and linked to the county's graduation events. Ceremonies were held at Eastern Randolph, Randleman, Southwestern Randolph and Trinity high schools at 9 a.m. Saturday. Then Providence Grove, Randolph Early College and Wheatmore followed at 10 a.m. Chairs were spaced six feet apart, free "Class of 2020" face coverings were worn and guests were asked to respect the safety of oth-

ers by doing their part. The festivities provided that last opportunity for seniors to enjoy a centuries-old rite of passage.

Staff writer Daniel Kennedy may be reached at [dkennedy@atnonline.net](mailto:dkennedy@atnonline.net), or at 336-888-3578.