

Eleven Graduates Look Ahead to Bright Futures

by Emma Rose Mumma, Director of Development and Philanthropy

There is seldom a dry eye at a Wye River Upper School graduation, and this year was no exception. We once again witnessed with great joy once-young ninth-graders who visibly carried the weight of their learning differences on their shoulders, now smiling brightly and walking proudly across the stage as mature, young adults. This new sense of confidence was apparent in the faces of the eleven graduates- Amanda (Glen Burnie), Bennett (Centreville), Coale (Odenton), Daniel (Still Pond), Danny (Gambrills), Garrett (Grasonville), Jackson M. (Severna Park), Jackson W. (Stevensville), Laura (Chestertown), Olivia (Annapolis), and Tyler (Annapolis).

The impact of this year's graduation was felt with great significance after the past eighteen months, which required an unprecedented amount of resilience and perseverance on the part of the students. During his opening remarks, Interim Head of School Dave Mullen expressed his appreciation to the faculty and staff by recognizing the crucial role they played in each graduate's transformation, while graduate Jackson W. reflected on his four year journey at Wye River and left underclassmen with a few words of advice. "I urge all students who may be 'going through challenges' to take a minute, step back and really see how

things are. This is a great school, these are great teachers, and these are great students."

Founder and former Head of School, Chrissy Aull, was honored to return to Wye River Upper School (WRUS) to deliver the commencement address in which she encouraged the students to chart their own course. "As a high school graduate, tomorrow you become the master of your fate, the driver of your own bus. For sure, there will be co-pilots and navigators pushing you along but it is important that you now see yourself as the young adult you are. This evening is the pivot, a moment in time in which your parents hand the torch to you and you now light your own path towards adulthood."

Aull continued by recognizing the greatest strength of every WRUS student, "No matter which path you are choosing, do so with boldness and determination. If there is one attribute each of you have, it is grit. You don't successfully navigate the world of learning differences without it. You've got grit. The world rewards grit. Use it well and mindfully; make it your superpower as you go forward."

Tyler R. '21 reflected Chrissy Aull's words in his remarks as he looks forward to the bright futures that lie ahead. "At the end of the day every sunset comes to an end, just like our time at Wye



Tyler Russell '21 addresses his fellow graduates

River, ending a chapter in our lives, but beginning a new adventure with new sunrises ahead. May the book of great tales begin!" It is always a bittersweet goodbye to send the students who once filled our classrooms and hallways off as they embark on their subsequent journeys with the strengths that were always inside them now fully encompassed, blossomed, and ready to become the "masters of their fate."





Geneya M. '23, Tyler J. '22, Avery C. '24

Real-World Experience, Lifelong learning

by Matthew Cowan, Assistant Head of School

As we approach the end of a school year overshadowed by a global pandemic, there remains a ray of optimism as we welcome a return to one of the most notable hallmarks of the Wye River Upper School (WRUS) experience: experiential learning. Countless studies have found that the benefits of experiential learning are vast. Experiential learning helps create real-world relevance for understanding, provides opportunities for creativity and problem solving, teaches the value of mistakes, and cultivates executive function and metacognitive skills. A typical school year at WRUS is interspersed with experiential learning opportunities such as advocating for legislature in Annapolis, competing in the Science Olympiads, and examining works of contemporary art at the Glenstone Museum. For most of 2020, these sorts of experiences were put on pause, but as we enter the final week of the second semester, the buses are being gassed up, teachers are shutting down

Alumni Spotlight

A True Wye River Success Story

by Tracie Spence, Director of Enrollment Management and Communications

"I didn't want to go!" This is what Annika Koehler, a 2017 graduate, said when her parents decided that she would attend Wye River Upper School (WRUS). Koehler says that her parents were fed up with public schools and began looking at private schools for her to attend. "Wye River was not my favorite."

Koehler, who struggles with ADHD and an anxiety disorder, had difficulty with

Google Meet, and students are getting out of the classroom!

Just the other week, underclassmen immersed themselves in all things Chesapeake Bay when they took a day trip to the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center. There they learned about native birds of prey up-close, examined oysters and their ecological impact on the Bay, and kayaked, exploring the wetlands and shoreline habitats.

Earlier in May, we saw the Art, Music, and MakerSpace Expo return. This event is always a highlight for our community. Even though we weren't able to host live performances this year, there was a diverse exhibit of fine, digital, and performing arts showcased in the gym. As we know, arts and maker pursuits are best suited to collaborative and tactile learning. Still, our students are resilient and innovative and managed to produce art even when they had to work remotely. In addition to this showcase, our Global Studies students were fortunate enough to experience a unique, actor-less theater production at the Shakespeare Theater Company. The show, called *Blindness*, used light and sound design to tell the story of a community that must overcome an

testing her entire life. In public school, she had to go to a different classroom to take a test. "It made me feel different and was so embarrassing!" But, the inclusivity, small classes, and family atmosphere at WRUS allowed Koehler to thrive.

Koehler says that one of the main things she learned at WRUS were self-advocacy skills. "I didn't feel ashamed and I wasn't alone in needing and asking for extra help." These skills were especially helpful when she began attending college. "Accommodations were standard at Wye River. Not in college."

Koehler, who will begin her last semester of nursing school at the University of

epidemic of blindness by embracing love and hope over fear and paranoia. In a year dominated by Fauci health briefings, this was undoubtedly a cathartic and moving experience.

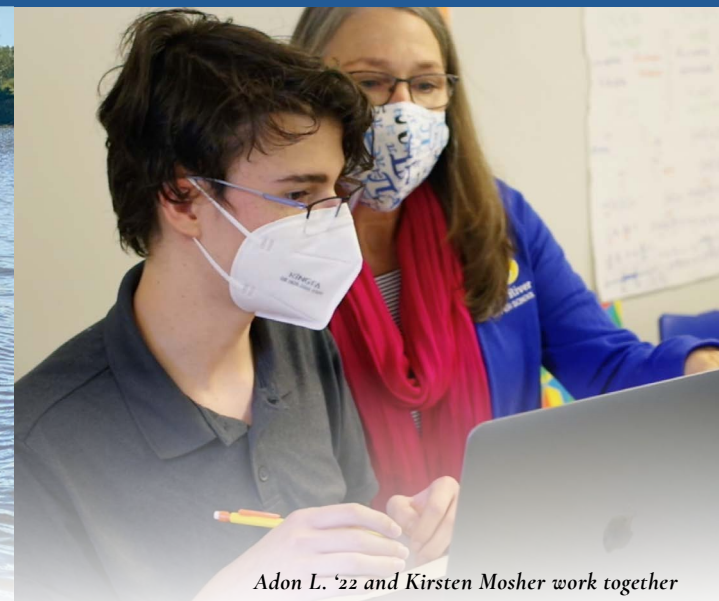
The culmination of a WRUS education and four years of experiential learning is the Senior Portfolio Presentation. Each spring, every senior student presents six artifacts representing their cumulative educational journey and mastery of the 21st Century Demonstrations of Learning. These include coding, persuasive writing, exercising leadership, goal setting, creating a work of art, and exhibiting media literacy. Over their tenure at WRUS, students fulfill these demonstrations throughout their multidisciplinary studies and sometimes through their extracurricular activities. The presentation is a showcase of their work and an opportunity to reflect on learning, challenges, and most importantly, personal growth as a student and a young adult. Watching these capstone presentations is a highlight for many faculty who shared in the transformative journey with the students, a journey enriched by opportunities to learn outside of the classroom.

Maryland School of Nursing, Baltimore, in the fall and will graduate in December, would like to work with the University of Maryland Medical Center. "I have a passion for women's health. I'd like to become a nurse practitioner or mid-wife."

So, what does Koehler think of her experience now? "It worked out better than I expected. Wye River did what was best for me. It was the perfect fit!" Koehler says she thrived and owes her success to the school.

She's a true Wye River success story.

If you have a WRUS success story you'd like to share, please contact emmamumma@wyeriverupperschool.org.



Adon L. '22 and Kirsten Mosher work together

Growth-Mindset Culture leads to Growth in Student Achievement

by Matthew Cowan, Assistant Head of School

As we return to evidence-informed and multi-modal instruction in the classroom and in-person, we see our teachers able to break free from the restraints of virtual learning. They are dynamic educators well-versed in differentiation, deeply connected to the students, and stewards of a growth-mindset culture. This is evidenced, in part, by the overwhelmingly positive results from our most recently administered curriculum-based measures in math and reading. In April, all students complete a curriculum-based assessment (FastBridge) in reading and math, and we are delighted to report significant growth in both areas. As a school, we saw a 20% increase in students meeting the grade-level benchmarks in math. In reading, we saw an 11% increase. We are immensely proud of our students for not allowing the circumstances of the past year to stand in the way of learning and academic achievement. We also share our gratitude with our phenomenal teaching team and their commitment to student growth.

(below) Annika K. '17



(from left) Chrissy Aull, Dave Mullen, Stephanie Folarin

Dear New Friends,

I am thrilled to begin my tenure as Head of School at Wye River Upper School (WRUS). Over the last few months, I've met with students, teachers, administrators, parents, grandparents, trustees, and friends of WRUS. With each conversation, I've learned more about the culture of the school and the special role it plays in each person's life. I look forward to continuing these powerful conversations so that I am able to keep the vision, passions, and goals of the community at the forefront of my mind.

As this global pandemic continues to impact the world economy, our mental and physical health, and our sense of belonging and safety, the WRUS community has remained cohesive, positive, and strong. I had the privilege of spending some time at WRUS as students began full day in-school sessions and I witnessed an inspiring and incredible outpouring of joy. I remain inspired by the reunion I witnessed among students and staff. After the much-needed summer vacation, we will continue our full day in-school sessions, as we continue to dedicate ourselves to learning and growing together under one roof.

I will continue to have monthly coffees on Zoom to share updates on the school and receive updates and ideas from the community. In addition, I will continue in Mr. Mullen's remarkable footsteps by updating the community weekly on our *Wye River Currents* blog and our weekly school newsletter which is emailed to the community on Thursdays. And as I learn and create traditions, review and clarify school policies, and become informed on new advances in teaching and raising bright learning challenged students, I will share videos, podcasts, and special letters with you. With these various modes of communication, I believe everyone in our community will receive information seamlessly and remain updated on the school's happenings.

During my first year, I plan to build strong connections within the WRUS community and spread the word about our name and extraordinary mission. With your continued strength and support, we can carry forward the critical work that Mrs. Aull started when she founded this great institution.

Best,

Stephanie Borges Folarin

Stephanie Borges Folarin
Incoming Head of School

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Dear Friends,

As I conclude my journey at Wye River Upper School I'd like to thank you for your support throughout this difficult year. There is much for which I'm grateful... the support of the board of directors, the diligence and professionalism of our teachers and staff, the kind words from parents, and, most importantly, the incredible resiliency and fortitude of our students. The Wye River community is an amazing group of which to be a part.

It has been a challenging year in so many ways, yet much has gone well. To date we've had no in-school transmission of covid, and only one member of our community became ill with the virus. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we've been able to upgrade our internet service for remote teaching, improve classroom filtration and ventilation, support the use of personal protective equipment, and maintain physical distancing in our classrooms and busses. The faculty and staff have stepped up in amazing ways, creating and refining hybrid schedules throughout the year as circumstances changed, and managing upgrades to the building and transportation while keeping our students moving forward. Our families and students have been amazing, rolling with the changes and displaying incredible resiliency in the face of these challenges.

As we transition to the next chapter of the Wye River story, I am proud of what we've done and excited about our future. I've enjoyed working with Chrissy to learn the history and traditions of our school, and also with Stephanie as she brings new energy and expertise to our shared endeavor. I look forward to watching from afar as Wye River Upper School continues to grow and thrive.

I look forward to a terrific end to this school year, and hope to meet those I haven't been able to meet in-person during our 20th Anniversary celebrations over the next couple of years.

You have something very special at Wye River Upper School, please continue to support the school, our students, and our teachers to the extent of your ability.

And again, thank you for this wonderful adventure!

Dave

Dave Mullen
Interim Head of School