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South High seniors told choices matter

School board President Stephanie Garcia says she didn't give her friends free hamburgers.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS McLEAN -- Newly graduated members of South High School's Class of 2009 clutch their diplomas while reciting their class motto for the last time following the commencement ceremony Saturday at the Colorado State Fair Events Center.

**By JAMES AMOS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

South High School's 351 graduating seniors should be proud of themselves, but still ready to work harder in the future, they were told at the school's graduation ceremony Saturday.

South Principal Patrick Krumholz said this class has set high marks, but will have to remember to make more progress as generations before have done for it.

"But if we keep turning out students of your caliber, we'll be OK," he said.

Class Valedictorian Brenden Ortiz told his classmates at the Colorado State Fair Events Center that their futures have much to do with the choices they make now and later. Sharing the past four years of their lives together, South's students now have to make rational choices that they can accept, even if criticized, he said.

The world's economy and social landscapes are changing, Ortiz said. "It takes true strength to persevere," he said. "Thank you, South High. May each person succeed."

Salutatorian Kalli-Anne Kemling said she knew she didn't want to talk about the past or the future for her remarks.

"I'm just as confused about the future as all of you," she said. And "a commencement isn't supposed to be the end of everything."

Instead, she told her classmates to live for the present.

"Every moment you have is a gift," she said. "Congratulations to the Class of 2009. You did it guys."

Stephanie Garcia, president of the Pueblo City Schools board, said she, too, was a South High graduate 32 years ago. To prepare for her remarks, she said she looked back in her old yearbooks to see what advice her friends and others had written there.

Many friends knew she worked at McDonald's at the time and pressured her to get them a free hamburger, she said.

"I got promoted, so I'm pretty sure I ignored that advice," she said.

Some wrote that she should remain active with her gymnastics, but, Garcia said, "Today, I'm really lucky to get through a yoga class."

But she said she has taken to heart and lived advice she got from some friends to "keep reaching for the stars."

"I may not have changed the world," she said. "But I try to change my little corner of it.

"What matters most is that you love what you do and give it your very best."

She honored South for receiving the district's first traveling Lamp of Knowledge, a testament to the school's demonstration of the values of leadership, character, scholarship and service.

The ceremony was interrupted briefly by a man in the audience saying unintelligible things through a portable loudspeaker. He also held a large sign that began "Repent." He was escorted out of the center by a security officer.