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SENIORS GO OUT WITH A POP – A last surprise from the 2019 La Conner High School graduating class came just before they recessed: confetti cannons were pulled out and they showered themselves and the gym floor with glitter. May all their roads ahead be bright. Congratulations!
– Photo by Ken Stern

Community con-grad-ulates La Conner's Class of 2019

By Bill Reynolds

La Conner High seniors went out with a bang Thursday night.

Near the end of the school's 125th annual commencement exercises the large audience at Landy James Gymnasium was briefly shaken by a loud celebratory confetti blast.

The surprise dramatic send-off for the Class of 2019 seemed a fitting salute to a student group noted for having done a bang-up job, reflected in numerous academic and athletic successes and devotion to public service and civic projects.

Class speakers had earlier, though at much lower decibel levels, recounted many of those achievements, several of which are now recognized on state scholastic and sports championship banners.

But reaching those lofty heights wasn't as easy as it looked, according to Class Valedictorian Sophia Benetti, who thanked the La Conner faculty for teaching life lessons in addition to those shared from their subject areas.

Johnson reflects on resignation

By Ken Stern

A reluctant and cautious Georgia Johnson spoke with the Weekly News Monday about the agreement she negotiated with the La Conner School district – that is, through her lawyer, Tom Brennan, and Bill Coats, the District's attorney. Johnson, 67, signed the agreement Tuesday to resign as food services director, a job she has had for 15 years. June 21 is her last day.

Johnson agreed to the settlement minutes before the June 4 special meeting of the School District Board of Directors. The one action item on the agenda was a resolution to not renew her contract for 2019-20. The Board was set to vote on finding "it is in the best interest of the District to non-renew the contract of Georgia Johnson. The reasons for Georgia Johnson's contract non-renewal are set forth in her 2018-19 evaluation, which has been reviewed by the Board of Directors."

Johnson and her attorney met with the School Directors, Super-

"They taught us," said Benetti, "how to overcome the obstacles in life."

The La Conner High experience, she added, "made us stronger and more prepared to face the world."

For Benetti, that realization came well before graduation. She said it felt surreal to walk into the high school building on the first

By Ken Stern

This corrects and updates the June 5 Weekly News story which inaccurately concluded Georgia Johnson reached an agreement with the La Conner School District to continue as food services director in September for the next school year.

Georgia Johnson lost her job without a whisper from her employer June 4 at their specially called School Board meeting.

Co-workers, colleagues and

intendent Whitney Meissner and Coats the day before, June 3, and Johnson expressed her concerns.

Johnson carefully chose her words but was also hesitant and seemed to struggle throughout the interview. "I had an experience" she said. "It has been kind of multi-dimensional for me, ca-thartic."

She projects the sense of a process that is incomplete.

Johnson held up "the La Conner community standing by their friends and neighbors. I have been overwhelmed and amazed at the letters written for me and the outpouring of people's best wishes for me. This is all a reflection of what the La Conner community is all about, standing by their friends and neighbors. I would have liked to be here serving the district in the next year. I am glad to have reached an agreement with the district."

The School Directors are Janie Beasley, chair, Lynette Cram, Susan Deyo, Brad Smith and Kate Szurek.

day of her senior year.

"I realized then," she said, "that it was the last year to make the best memories and forge the strongest friendships."

Salutatorian Matty Lagerwey, a multiple state athletics gold medalist – she wrapped up her senior year winning titles in volleyball and track-and-field – echoed those sentiments.

friends statements, whether loud and passionate or sent as emails and letters to the La Conner School District Board of Directors, did not win the day. Superintendent Whitney Meissner is not renewing Johnson's contract for food service director, apparently an administrative decision not requiring Board approval.

The Board declined to act to consider the 16 year director of food services job tenure. Weeks earlier Meissner had chosen to not rehire Johnson for what would be her final year. The School Board removed the non-renewal of her contract from their agenda. They did not address the issue to the 70 people attending, tacitly endorsing Meissner's decision.



FINE ART FOR A FINE AUCTION – The winning bidder of this glass piece by La Conner artist Steve Klein bought a package of a 3-piece kiln-formed glass serving set, a studio experience – tour – at Klein's home, and a meal for six. Docent volunteers are assisting Ian Lindsay, auctioneer. The photographer is an artist, too.
– Photo courtesy of CB Bell

School unions vote 'no confidence' in superintendent

By Ken Stern

The La Conner School District's two unions each turned thumbs down on their boss, Superintendent Whitney Meissner, in "no confidence" votes at meetings each held Friday at the school campus.

The La Conner Education Association, LEA, voted 35 to 9, with 44 of 48 members present. The support staff, Public School Employees, PSE, voted 22 to 6, with three abstentions, with 31 of 46 members present. The secret ballot votes were 80 and 79 percent yes, respectively.

A joint press release believed to contain some of the same language as a letter emailed Friday to the District's Board of Directors states:

"During the past two years, Dr. Meissner has engaged in many damaging management practices that negatively impact staff, students and the community. Chief areas of complaint include negative school culture and climate, poor communication, weak interpersonal skills, ineffective leadership and the harassment, intimidation and bullying of staff members.

See Superintendent's response on Page 6

"Union leadership and individual members have provided both written and verbal feedback to Dr. Meissner directly, completed mid-year feedback surveys issued by the superintendent and contacted board members with concerns in an effort to raise awareness of problem areas and improve relationships and working conditions. However, recent events and actions taken by the superintendent have escalated to the point that we are compelled to take stronger action."

The letter probably includes this concern: "The damage she has caused is significant and far-reaching, extending beyond the walls of the school into the larger community, as evidenced by several recent public meetings."

At the May Board meeting and a specially called June 4 Board meeting up, to 70 school staff, students and area residents attended. Food Services Director

"We're more than just classmates," said Lagerwey, who wrote her speech on the flight home from the senior class trip to Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. "We have a bond that will last for the rest of our lives."

Class speakers Arlo Liddell and Jack Tronsdal went off-script to offer shout-outs of their own,
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Johnson loses school job. School Board mum at meeting

The June 5 print story was not accurate. The Weekly News communicated its wrong conclusion in the lead sentence and headline. Instead, Johnson does not have a job; the School District did not back down.

The resolution between Johnson and the district was stated by Johnson in a June 6 email: "I agreed to resign under certain circumstances which nullified the "termination with cause."

The School Board started the meeting removing the resolution of Johnson's non-renewal for next year from the agenda. Board Chair Janie Beasley then read this prepared statement: "We would
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