

Caring at root of White River record-setting student achievement

Honoring White River High School seniors for their accomplishments is a long-standing tradition, but this year's Hornet Honors program brought more smiles than usual. While sitting in the audience, administrators, staff, community members and parents became keenly aware a decade of dedication to programs and system changes is making a difference – all that caring about academics and life, is paying off for the kids.

The Class of 2018 recognized 10 valedictorians, students who earned a perfect 4.0 grade point average over the course of a four-year career.

Adrian Fernandez is one of them. He heads to the University of Washington in the fall to study business. He will be the first in his family to attend college and is part of White River's record-setting scholarship figure. Fernandez' entire undergraduate tuition at the UW will be covered.

Alexis Leighton is another of the 4.0 students. She earned a 253 PLU Bound Full Tuition Scholarship to Pacific Lutheran University, value \$166,784.

Eighteen seniors were awarded Washington State Honors, which means academically they are in the top 10 percent of all Washington state high school graduating seniors. Administrators also believe the WRHS Class of 2018 might set a new standard for graduation rate, which over the past few years hovers near 92 percent.

In addition, White River graduates earned the highest scholarship dollar figure in school history – \$2.8 million – eclipsing the \$1 million mark from 2010.

"It's incredible," Principal Cody Mothershead smiled.

"Every year has seen phenomenal growth," Assistant Superintendent Mike Hagadone said. "But it's not about the money. It's the work of the kids. It's the work of the staff. It starts at the elementary level. It's a standard of care across the district. It's the stories with those numbers."

Stories like those of Madeline Hambly and Tatiana Molinero-Ceras, which are based in relationships that keep students moving forward with confidence academically, socially and emotionally.

"The staff is amazing," Hambly said, firing off a long list of teachers, counselors and others who aided her in her journey. "They are easy to make relationships with. Without the staff here I probably would not have made it."

Hambly and Molinero-Ceras are two of 23 AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, students who account for \$429,334 in scholarship.

White River's AVID program, started in 2007, begins in middle school and continues through graduation. Each year approximately 25 students are selected for the program. For one period a day, students receive the additional academic, social and emotional support to help them succeed in the school's most rigorous courses.

"It springboards them to a future that they other-



White River's community scholarship recipients took center stage during the Hornet Honors program.

"Being kind, thoughtful, respectful and persistent about the things that matter is a great foundation for our Hornet graduates. It's really the prerequisite to being successful beyond high school. Thank you to our staff for investing in our kids."

— Superintendent Janel Keating Hambly

wise may not have had the opportunity," Hagadone said.

AVID students learn to think critically, collaborate, set high expectations and build confidence to conquer challenges ahead of them in the classroom and in life. Skills, guidance counselor Greg Benjamin said, are embedded into the White River system and used to reach all students.

"Wherever you are in your life there's something here for you," Benjamin said, noting the system of care at WRHS runs the gamut from extra-curricular activities to substance abuse and addiction counseling.

Hambly, who entered the program her sophomore year, credits AVID for concentrating her focus and getting the help she needed in math to push her toward her goal to study psychology at Highline Community College.

"Madeline was struggling in school and making poor life choices," Benjamin said. "The minute I met her you could see the change. She was here to take charge of her future. She joined AVID. It was confidence, not just academics. She realized we were going to take care of her and we weren't going to let her fail. She's a completely different person."

So is Molinero-Ceras, who entered high school as a quiet freshman, who yearned to become involved.

"I needed to learn to believe in myself," she said. "Mr. (John) Dorsey, the AVID teacher, helped me. I always feel like my accomplishments are never enough."

She gained confidence participating in sports and joining clubs.

"I wanted to earn a 4.0 and be valedictorian," said Molinero-Ceras about starting in AVID. "But I

learned grades don't define who you are."

Molinero-Ceras and Hambly are among 20 WRHS seniors to earn a College Bound Scholarship. Administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council, students apply in seventh and eighth grade after meeting income requirements. At graduation, students who meet the academic benchmarks, keep a clean criminal record, and submit college entry paperwork on time are eligible for a tuition waiver at any eligible college.

Pacific Lutheran University, Molinero-Ceras' school of choice, converted her College Bound scholarship into a 253 PLU Bound Full Tuition Scholarship, which she plans to use to become a Spanish teacher. She also is one of three White River students to earn a Meisenbach Leadership 1000 award. WRHS graduate John Meisenbach oversees the scholarship. He and retired teacher Dianne Campbell will stay in touch with the three graduates and keep them on track toward earning a degree. Many staff members at WRHS serve similar roles.

White River High seniors also get a boost from the generous Buckley community – 33 graduates earned scholarships provided by the local community totaling \$43,500, an average of \$1,318 per student. Molinero-Ceras earned at least two.

In their own way, Benjamin said, Hambly and Molinero-Ceras failed, learned something from failing and didn't let the failure define them.

"There are 285 additional stories that are just as amazing," said Benjamin, referring to the Class of 2018. "This is the kindest class. They've made taking care of your neighbors cool again. Life isn't about them, it's about giving back."

"This class will make a huge impact in the world."