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INDEX

The Avenue West Lafayette ........................................2
Basham Rentals .........................................................4
Blackbird Farms ..........................................................7
Chauncey Square .......................................................10
Chapakowit Property Management ..............................12
City Bus ......................................................................3
Cochran Apartments ..................................................3
Consolidated Property Management ..............................7
Cort ............................................................................6
The Cottages on Lindberg .............................................8
Crestview Apartments ................................................6
Evergreen Rentals/Village Center/Linwood Apartments ...6
Fratello Properties ......................................................7
Fuse ...........................................................................6
Guys and Dollies .........................................................5
Habitat for Humanity of Lafayette ..............................7
Hunter Lafayette Properties .........................................7
Launch Social Living ...................................................1
The Lodge on the Trail ................................................7
Market Square Storage ...............................................6
Morré Rentals ..........................................................4
Purdue Federal Credit Union.......................................6
Raymer Historic Apartments ......................................6
River Market ...............................................................3
University Crossing ....................................................3
Urban Market .............................................................4
Village West ...............................................................5
Weida Apartments .....................................................6

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Graduation season, an oft-emotional time of great celebration and reflection, is on the horizon. Though soon-to-be graduates are about to have one set of challenges firmly behind them, other important life decisions and experiences are looming in the not-too-distant future. Although there’s no magic set of rules for post-graduation, the following advice can help recent graduates transition from the classroom to the ceremony and then life after school.

- Attend the graduation ceremony. Graduating students may debate whether or not to attend their graduation ceremonies. Such ceremonies tend to be lengthy, and outdoor affairs can be hot and uncomfortable. However, graduation is a milestone moment that you won’t get to enjoy again. Attending graduation allows you one last academic experience, and even if that may seem like too meaningful right now, you might regret skipping the ceremony down the road.

- Enjoy graduation but buckle down once the dust settles. According to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the job market for new graduates is improving marginally. But the Institute for College Access and Success notes that many college graduates will be saddled with around $25,000 in debt upon earning their degrees. Many student loans have a six-month repayment grace period after graduation, so new grads who don’t already have a job lined up may want to use some of that grace period to travel, visit distant relatives or relax and recharge before their first payment comes due. Use the time wisely, but be prepared to buckle down when the time comes to start repaying loans.

- Join an alumni association. Regardless of the size of your school, chances are strong they have a local alumni association and several chapters across the country. Take advantage of these organizations to connect with fellow alumni, who can be invaluable sources of information and provide connections that may help you find a job in your field.

- Read and learn new skills. If you have yet to land that first job, use some of your down time to reacquaint yourself with reading for pleasure instead of reading as part of an assignment. You also can use extra time to explore new skills, such as learning certain software or applications that may help you stand out in a competitive job market.

- Before you decide what you want to do, you may have to figure out what you don’t like. Another way to use free time is to volunteer or apply for internships in fields you may want to work in. These experiences can help you determine your career options and find a career you find both challenging and exciting. But such opportunities can also help you determine when a given line of work isn’t for you. Oftentimes, finding the right career path takes some trial and error. Don’t get too down if an opportunity doesn’t pan out. Instead, keep your head up and take advantage of the next opportunity that comes your way. Graduation is a time of mixed emotions. Graduates can not only use graduation season to make lasting memories with friends but also to take the first steps toward the next phase of their lives.
Dogs are wonderful companion animals, providing their owners with loyal friends who are seemingly always up for walks or games of frisbee. Dog ownership is rewarding, but it’s also a significant responsibility. Before adopting a shelter dog or buying from a breeder, prospective dog owners should consider a host of factors to determine if now is the best time for them to welcome a new four-legged friend into the family.

• Time: Some pets do not require their owners to commit much of their time. For example, fish and bird owners don’t need to take their pets outside for walks or bathroom breaks, making them ideal pets for men and women who want a pet but don’t have the time to devote to caring for more needy animals. Men and women considering getting a dog should make an honest assessment of how much time they have to take care of their animals. Dogs don’t just need their owners to take them for walks and let them into the backyard to go to the bathroom. Dogs are social animals and need their owners to spend time with them every day. Men and women with especially hectic schedules may want to delay getting a dog until they can free up more time in their days.

• Money: Owning a dog requires a considerable financial commitment, one that extends far beyond the adoption fees or prices established by private breeders. Dogs need food, comfortable shelter, toys, and medical care, which can be extensive should dogs get sick. Some dog owners buy pet insurance to offset the cost of veterinarian visits, while others simply pay out of pocket when their dogs have medical expenses. Dogs tend to have physical problems from their owners, which is why routine veterinary visits are so important. Many veterinarian recommend at least annual visits for dogs under the age of 10 and visits every six months for dogs 10 and older. Men and women should make sure they can afford those visits before bringing a dog into their lives.

• Climate: Where you live should also influence your decision to get a dog. Though climate won’t necessarily prevent you from adopting a dog, you may want to avoid adopting certain breeds of dogs depending on where you live. For example, short-nosed breeds, including English bulldogs and pugs, are highly susceptible to heat stroke, as their shorter airways give them less of a chance to cool the air they draw into their bodies. Men and women living in especially warm climates may want to avoid short-nosed breeds in favor of dogs that are better equipped to handle the heat.

• Age of the dog: Many prospective dog owners want to adopt puppies so they can be with their new best friends through all stages of their dogs’ lives. But puppies can be difficult to house train, and that training takes a combination of time, money, and patience. If you are not ready to commit all these to house training your dog, then consider adopting an older dog that is already house trained.

• Family members or roommates: Dogs make wonderful additions to a home, but not everyone is cut out for living with dogs. If you live with other people, be it family members or roommates, it’s best to consult with them before bringing a dog home, as dogs can change the dynamic of any living arrangement. In addition, you may unknowingly live with someone who has a dog allergy and cannot cohabitate with a dog. Consult the people you live with before bringing a dog home, and only do so if you have their blessing.

Dogs are great companions who can greatly improve their owners’ quality of life. But dog ownership is not for everyone, and prospective dog owners should first consider a host of factors before bringing dogs into their homes.
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