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DeKalb County
Graduation
2026

The Garrett Clipper
The **Star**

Before You Graduate

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Finally, the end is in sight. After all those hours studying, writing papers and sweating the exams, you're finally set to graduate.

Even the effort and planning of the day itself might have come and gone. But you deserve to savor this moment, after all you've accomplished. Here's how:

DRINK IT ALL IN

Don't let these final moments of high school or college go by unrecognized. This time is irreplaceable, and nothing can truly compare to it. Take a moment to fully appreciate the sights and sounds of an ordinary school day, knowing these experiences will soon give way to something new.

REMEMBER MENTORS

Take a moment to remember the people who supported and guided you along the way. Staying in touch with mentors after graduation can open doors, offer perspective and provide encouragement as you move into your next chapter.



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BEGIN NETWORKING

For college graduates, building connections in your field can be a valuable next step. Casual conver-

sations with professionals — whether over coffee or through a brief introduction online — can help you learn more about your

industry and begin forming meaningful relationships.

ENCOURAGE OTHERS

Graduation marks a shared milestone, but the paths that follow will look different for everyone. Some will move quickly into careers or further education, while others take time to explore what comes next.

Supporting one another through these transitions helps maintain the sense of community built along the way.

LOOK BACK FONDLY

Take pride in what you've accomplished. From early classes to final exams, each step contributed to reaching this milestone. Whether you finished at the top of your class or simply crossed the finish line, earning a degree reflects persistence and dedication. While each graduate's path will unfold differently, the achievement itself is shared — and lasting.



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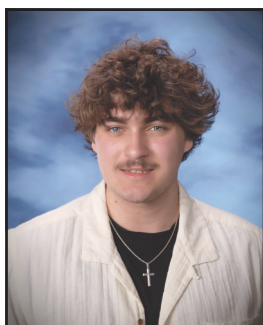
Brand, Jaxen



Brandon, Ashlynn



Brown, Christopher



Bryant, Austin



Buchanan, Kate



Burgo, Gideon



Burton, David



Caldwell, Dreyden



Campbell, Samuel



Carper, Xander



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Clingan, Connor



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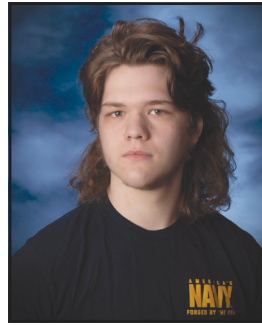
Cooper, Kodie



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Culler, Brady



Damron, Madison



Davis, Bridget



Davis, Olivia



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DePriest, Ecko



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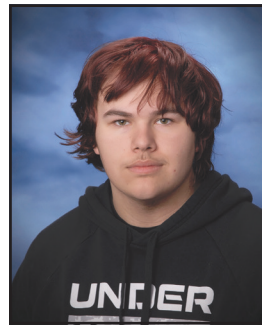
Keesler, Luke



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Time to Move Out

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

What you choose for your future residence after graduation will be related to your after-school plans.

Are you moving from high school to college or technical school? Are you planning to jump directly into a job, or do you intend to further your studies in graduate school? What about a gap year?

LIVING ON CAMPUS

Students who leave high school for college may prefer to live on campus, particularly if they're attending a school far from home. If you decide to live independently during your studies, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of renting an apartment versus living in a dormitory. Take note of costs, necessary utilities, and any travel expenses associated with your commitments. Some schools now require students to live



SEAN LOCKE

on campus for a set time. These dormitories provide convenience, but usually close during school breaks.

YOUR FIRST PLACE

After finishing college, some might worry about living far from key industry

hubs. But many employers now conduct video interviews to attract talent globally. If you've secured a job, working with a real estate agent can help you find a suitable home or apartment within your budget. Even when

moving far away, you can coordinate online with these home-selling pros to ensure all arrangements are settled before your relocation. Your parents may be able to help. Of course, not having a job lined up can complicate your

living situation. You might consider relocating to a city with better job prospects or staying in your family residence while you look for work or get established in a job.

STAYING PUT?

If you're a high school graduate heading to a nearby uni-

versity, you might find that relocating isn't necessary. When college is close to your family home, commuting daily can be a cheaper, easier option. For high schoolers, it is far easier to balance a job while studying with a manageable commute – so look for nearby employment opportunities. Some college graduates return to their family homes after completing their education. This choice allows them to save money while searching for job opportunities or to take a momentary pause between school and work.

— THE —

Future

BELONGS TO YOU!

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What Happens Next



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BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

There's no single path forward after graduation.

High school graduates are preparing their big move to college or technical school, while some college graduates may be considering a master's degree or going straight into their chosen careers.

Still others may take a "gap year" away.

Wherever you are headed, here are some things that help move you forward once that diploma or degree is in hand.

YOUR FINANCES

Whether you're off for more education or starting a new job, set up a budget before leaving the nest. Have your parents help; they've likely been doing it for years. Don't forget to set aside some for savings, too, in case of emergencies. (Oh, and be sure to define "emergency." A flat tire or visit to the ER is; late-night food deliveries are not.)

You'll need to set up a checking account and a savings account and, if you're going right into the workforce, a retirement account. If you don't know already, learn how taxes work


and how much will be taken out of each check.

HOUSEKEEPING DUTIES



Hopefully, you've picked up everyday skills like laundry, cooking and cleaning during your time at home. If not, start learning before you find yourself on your own. Once you get your first apartment or dorm room, you'll have to perform the basics of living on your own, including how to cook, clean the bathroom, wash your clothes and other basic life skills. Some other things to learn include how your health insurance works and basic car care, if you're taking a vehicle with you.

TIME MANAGEMENT

As you transition from school to whatever's next, you'll find that you're suddenly the master of your own time. There are no parents to wake you or feed you and no bells to make sure you go where you're needed next. Start practicing time management before you leave home. Give yourself plenty of time to get to class or to work, to get home and to make meals. Monitor your cash flow, since that will determine when you can pay bills and run errands.




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Strong, Andrew



Tadsen, Aubree



Tincher, Dylan



Traster, Macey



Trenary, Tommie



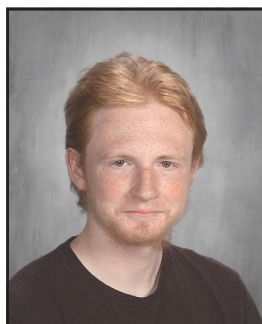
Tulley-Coe, Tamera



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Walters, Isaac



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Ullom, Daxton



Gap Year: Taking Time Off

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Finishing high school is more than a four-year commitment.

Counting pre-K, most graduates have been in school for 13 straight years by then – the vast majority of their lives. If you went straight to college and graduated, you may have been in school for 17 years, or longer. That could leave anyone feeling drained after dedicating so much time to studying, writing essays and passing exams. So, would taking a year off be right for you?

THE GAP YEAR CONCEPT

Some view the period between high school and college or between college and entering the workforce as a chance to evaluate things. Graduates can take part in travel adventures or in community service, both of which can be hard to fit into a busy new schedule in college or at work. That’s how the idea of a gap year originated. It’s a break from the continuous demands of academia or employment. Ahead lies a big future, with much still unknown. Taking some time away could help you gain new focus.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY

Deciding whether to take a gap year is a personal choice, and there is no single right reason to do



DMYTRO BUIANSKYI

so. What matters most is having a clear sense of purpose and a plan for how the time will be used. For some, a gap year provides space to explore interests, reconsider academic goals or gain clarity about a chosen field of study. Others may use the time after college to travel, meet new people and broaden their perspective—experiences that can help shape future career decisions.

KEY FACTORS TO THINK ABOUT

A gap year can come with trade-offs. Some students may need to navigate changes to

scholarships or delay entering the workforce, while others take on part-time or temporary jobs to support themselves during the year. Entering

the workforce right away may offer opportunities that include college credit or pathways to financial assistance. For those interested in structured

programs, organizations such as the Gap Year Association provide information about grants, scholarships and planning resources.





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Sato, Tsumiya



Smazenko, Ethan



Sprague, Joshua



Stowell, Mya



Warner, Makenna



Willibey, Austyn

Remembering the Big Day

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

You've probably heard it a million times: Graduation is going to be an unforgettable day. But it will pass by in a blur of ceremony and emotion.

Documenting everything preserves each special moment throughout the day.

THE RIGHT ONE

Seek out advice from relatives or older friends when choosing a graduation photographer. Their insights can help you find the right fit. Take time to explore online portfolios, since they can provide a greater understanding of a photographer's style. Establish and stick to a photography budget since costs can vary widely. Don't forget that there will be related expenses like invitations, clothing and trips. After selecting a photographer, communicate your expectations clearly but remain open to their professional suggestions.

WHAT TO SHOOT

Obviously, snapshots in your cap and gown are a must. But casual photos with your friends and family are great keepsakes. Consider posing near a historic building on campus or exploring a beautiful

waterfront area or garden. Invite your classmates, since they've been instrumental in your educational experience.

Ask the photographer to capture some candid shots during the graduation ceremony, rather than just your entrance and the moment you receive your diploma. With so much happening in a busy event, it can be tough to absorb everything. Then make sure they get plenty of pictures as you celebrate with loved ones afterward. These moments will be cherished by everyone involved.

WHY IT MATTERS

In the future, when you have settled into your new life, pictures can bring back fond memories. Your parents will likely cherish this important occasion and may want to display some of these photos at home. Additionally, your new images can act as a valuable asset for your career. High-quality photos can enhance your profile on professional sites like LinkedIn and elevate your resume. The initial years in college or job-hunting can often be tight financially. This may be an opportunity to create a polished headshot or professional portrait.



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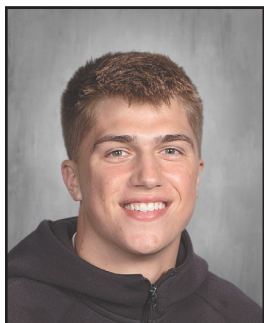
Boltz, Conner



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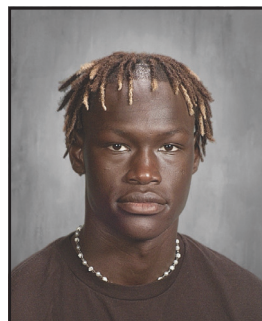
Grim, Kaylyn



Gross, Alyssa



Grubb, Cameron



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Hess, Lauren



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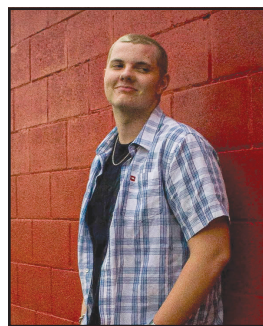
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Zimmerman, Drew



Paying Off Your Student Loans

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Experts say the average student loan debt for newly graduated college students is in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Some don't know how to move forward after their higher education career. Here's a look at what's ahead.

EXIT COUNSELING

Federal law requires exit counseling as part of your college's graduation process. During this session, you will learn about the types of loans that you have and your options for repayment. You'll need to bring along some information to complete exit counseling: the names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of your closest living relative, two references who live in the U.S. and your employer or future employer, if there is one. Check with your particular office of financial aid to find out more.

MAKING PAYMENTS

You will be assigned a federal loan servicer that will handle all the billing information regarding your government student loans. Generally speaking, you will start making payments six months after you graduate. Signing up for automatic debit takes a lot of the stress out of paying your student loan bill. Some borrowers may get a reduction in

interest rates when they do.

LOWERING OR SUSPENDING PAYMENTS

Having trouble making payments? If you need to lower or suspend them because of financial hardship, contact your loan servicer. There are several options: An increase in your family size or a decrease in your income makes you immediately eligible for a recalculation in an income-driven repayment plan. You can apply for a deferment or forbearance that will allow you to stop making payments altogether. It's important to note, however, that you will still accrue interest charges. Deferments and forbearance may affect potential loan forgiveness options.

DELINQUENCY AND DEFAULT

Your student loans must be repaid. If you've missed a payment, immediately contact your loan servicer to discuss options. Your loan becomes delinquent the first day after you miss a student loan payment and it remains delinquent until you repay the past due amount or make other arrangements. If you're delinquent for 90 days or more, your loan servicer will report the delinquency to the major national credit bureaus – and your credit score will be affected.



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POULTRY

Congratulations to all the 2026 graduates! Best of luck on your next chapters!



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 Best wishes and continue to make your community proud!



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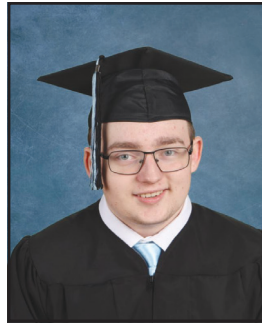
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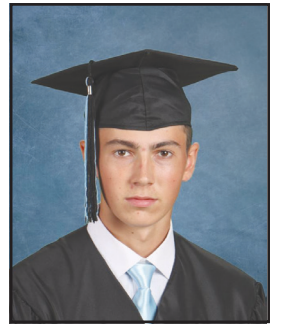
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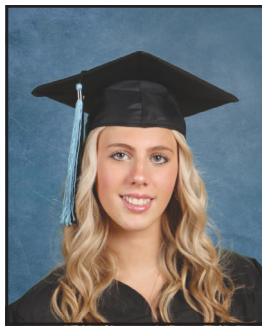
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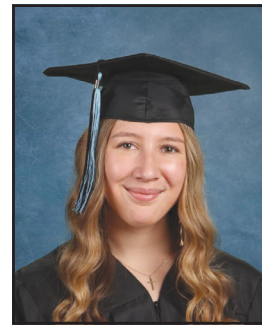
Perry, Cooper



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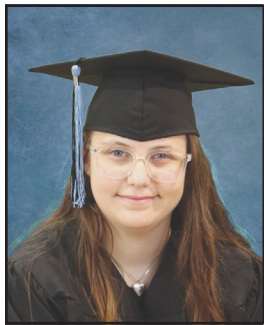
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Going to Grad School

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

A bachelor’s degree might just be one step in your academic journey.

Some jobs require graduate-level study. Other graduates pursue advanced degrees for personal or professional reasons.

When evaluating graduate schools, consider the specifics of what they offer and whether that will bolster your credentials in the field of your choice. The school’s accreditation and ranking may play a role in future hiring decisions. Other factors to keep in mind include:

PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME

Consider whether you want to enroll part-time or full-time. Scheduling could be a big problem if you are working while going to graduate school.

Some programs require full-time enrollment, whereas others make room for busy part-time students. The choice to go part- or full-time affects the commitment needed to earn the degree with the former taking longer to complete than the latter.

IN-PERSON OR ONLINE?

An increasing number of graduate programs are now offering hybrid or fully online graduate degrees. This could be beneficial for people with busy schedules who want to pursue an education without the pressures of mandatory in-person attendance. Find out whether the online courses are accredited. In some fields, getting a degree from an accredited school is required to get the job. Look into what

types of accreditation are recognized in your area of study, and ask potential schools about their status if it’s not already made clear.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Choose a program where the curriculum aligns with your schedule and specific area of study.

Ask whether faculty or academic advisors are available throughout your studies. Those going into research fields will need to choose programs with adequate facilities. Research the career trajectories of their alumni; this can be a terrific gauge for your own success. Discuss financial assistance and loan options,

since some undergraduate support doesn’t extend into post-graduate studies. If you’re moving to a new area to go to school, research housing availability and living costs. Remember that graduate programs typically require a separate application fee. They may require more testing and recommendation letters.

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Health Insurance for Graduates

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Health insurance is complicated for everyone, and especially so for graduates who are in a new phase of their life and may have to get their own coverage for the first time.

With proper guidance, graduates can make informed decisions about their coverage options and ensure access to essential healthcare services.

Understanding Coverage Options

After graduation, graduates may find themselves in different situations regarding health insurance coverage.

Coverage under a parents' plan: Many young adults can remain on their parents' health insurance plan until they turn 26, thanks to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This option provides comprehensive coverage and may be the most cost-effective solution for recent graduates, especially if their parents' plan offers employer-sponsored coverage.

Employer-sponsored insurance: Graduates who secure employment with a company that offers health



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insurance benefits may have the option to enroll in an employer-sponsored plan. These plans vary in coverage and cost, so it's essential to carefully review the details and compare options.

Individual health insurance plans: For graduates who are not eligible for coverage under their parents' plan or employer-sponsored

insurance, individual health insurance plans are available through the Health Insurance Marketplace, established by the ACA. These plans offer a range of coverage options and graduates may be eligible for premium subsidies or cost-sharing reductions based on income.

Medicaid and CHIP: Graduates with limited

income may qualify for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provide low-cost or free health coverage to eligible individuals and families. Eligibility criteria vary by state, so graduates should check with their state's Medicaid agency to determine eligibility and apply for coverage.

Navigating Choices

Assess your health care needs, including anticipated medical expenses, prescription medications, and any ongoing medical conditions or treatments. Choose a plan that provides adequate coverage for your needs while balancing costs. Review the network of doctors, hospitals and health care providers included in each plan's network. Ensure that your preferred health care providers are in-network to avoid additional out-of-pocket costs.

Consider the monthly premiums, deductibles and co-payments associated with each plan. Evaluate how these costs fit within your budget and weigh them against coverage benefits. If you require prescription medications, check each plan's formulary to ensure that your medications are covered and evaluate any associated costs, such as co-payments or coinsurance. Explore additional benefits offered by each plan, such as wellness programs, preventive care services and telehealth options. These benefits can enhance your overall health care experience and help you maintain optimal health.

Post-Graduation Anxiety

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Graduating from high school or college is a significant milestone, but it can also be a time of uncertainty and anxiety about what lies ahead.

The transition from student life to the real world can bring a range of emotions, from excitement and anticipation to fear and self-doubt. Navigating post-graduation anxiety requires resilience, self-awareness and proactive coping strategies to manage stress and uncertainty effectively.

WebMD reports that post-graduation distress is common. Libby O'Brien, a licensed professional counselor said, "The first thing to understand is that you're not alone. Feeling anxiety, depression or some degree of 'stuckness' and discomfort after graduating is normal. It's a change, and change can be very challenging to negotiate. You don't necessarily know what comes next."

Acknowledge Your Feelings

The first step in managing post-graduation anxiety is

to acknowledge and accept your feelings. It's normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed about the future, especially when facing uncertainty and change. Allow yourself to experience these emotions without judgment, and recognize that it's okay to feel scared or uncertain about what comes next.

Set realistic expectations for yourself during the transition from graduation to the next phase of your life. Avoid comparing your journey to others' or putting undue pressure on yourself to have everything figured out right away. Understand

that it's OK to take time to explore your options, make mistakes and learn from experiences along the way.

Self-Care

While there may be many unknowns about the future, focus on what you can control in the present moment. Set small, achievable goals for yourself, such as updating your resume, networking with professionals in your field or researching job or educational opportunities. Taking proactive steps toward your goals can help you regain a sense of agency

and empowerment.

Taking care of your physical, emotional and mental well-being is crucial during times of transition and uncertainty. Make self-care a priority by getting enough sleep, eating healthily, exercising regularly and engaging in activities that bring you joy and relaxation. Practice mindfulness, meditation or deep breathing exercises to help calm your mind and reduce stress.

Tennessee Tech advises its graduates to invest

SEE ANXIETY, PAGE A29

Meal Prep Tips for Graduates

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

For graduates who are leaving home and won't have a meal plan at college, suddenly having to feed yourself can seem like an overwhelming task.

Mastering the art of simple meal prep can help you maintain a healthy lifestyle on a budget.

With a little planning and creativity, you can whip up delicious and nutritious meals that will fuel your body and mind without breaking the bank.

Planning

When it comes to meal preparation, simplicity is key. Focus on recipes that require minimal ingredients and preparation time, such as one-pot meals, sheet pan dinners and easy stir-fries. Opt for versatile ingredients that can be used in multiple dishes, such as rice, pasta, beans and vegetables, to maximize efficiency and minimize waste.

Take some time each week to plan your meals and create a shopping list based on your menu. This will help you stay organized, save time at the grocery store and ensure that you have all the ingredients you need on hand when it's time to cook.



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Consider batch cooking and meal prepping on weekends to save time during the week and have healthy meals ready to go when you need them.

Keep staple ingredients on hand, such as canned beans, diced tomatoes, whole grains, olive oil, herbs and spices and condiments like soy sauce and vinegar. These pantry essentials can form the basis of a wide variety

of meals and add flavor and nutrition to your dishes.

Meal Choices and Techniques

Batch cooking is a time-saving technique that involves preparing large quantities of food at once and portioning it out for future meals. Cook a big batch of grains, protein and vegetables at the beginning

of the week and mix and match them to create different meals. Soups, stews, casseroles and grain bowls are all excellent candidates for batch cooking and can be customized to suit your tastes and dietary preferences.

Seek out simple and nutritious recipes that are easy to prepare, budget-friendly and packed with

flavor and nutrients to keep you feeling satisfied and energized throughout your day.

Overnight Oats

Food Network recommends overnight oats as a staple for college students and it provides this recipe.

Ingredients

- 1/3 to 1/2 cup of milk (any kind will do)
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup of old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup yogurt, optional
- 1 teaspoon chia seeds
- 1/2 mashed banana
- Optional ingredients: fruit, nuts, nut butter, seeds, protein powder, granola, coconut, spices, citrus zest and vanilla extract.

Directions

1. Add the desired amount of milk, oats, yogurt, chia seeds and banana to a jar or container and stir. Refrigerate overnight or for at least 5 hours.

2. Add additional liquid until you achieve your desired consistency. Top with optional ingredients.

The mixture will keep up to two days or four days if you don't add the banana.

ANXIETY

FROM PAGE A28

in something they are passionate about or to start a new hobby outside their comfort zone. It's a way, they say, to re-energize and regain focus, especially if those were things that you were too busy to do while in college.

Seek Support

Don't hesitate to reach out for support from friends, family members, mentors or mental health professionals if you're struggling with post-graduation anxiety. Talking openly about your feelings and concerns can provide validation, perspec-

tive, and practical advice for navigating this challenging time. Surround yourself with people who uplift and encourage you, and don't be afraid to lean on others for support when needed.

Embrace Uncertainty

Instead of viewing uncertainty as a barrier or source of anxiety, try to re-frame it as an opportunity for growth, exploration and self-discovery. Embrace the unknown as a chance to try new things, learn from experiences and expand your horizons. Remember that setbacks and challenges are a natural part of the journey and can lead to unexpected opportunities and insights.



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Networking Basics

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

As recent graduates embark on their professional journeys, building and nurturing a strong network of professional connections is essential for long-term success and career advancement.

Networking provides opportunities to exchange ideas, gain insights and open doors to new opportunities.

Start with Your Existing Network

Begin your networking journey by tapping into your existing network of family, friends, classmates, professors and alumni. Let them know that you're actively seeking opportunities in your field and ask whether they have any advice, leads or connections they can share. Personal referrals and introductions can be powerful tools for expanding your network and uncovering hidden

opportunities.

Expand Your Network

Attend networking events, industry conferences, career fairs and professional meetups in your area. These events provide valuable opportunities to meet and connect with professionals in your field, learn about industry trends and expand your knowledge and skills. Be proactive and approach people with confidence, introducing yourself and initiating conversations about shared interests and goals.

Online networking platforms such as LinkedIn, X (formerly known as Twitter) and professional forums provide powerful tools for connecting with professionals and building your personal brand. Create a compelling LinkedIn profile that highlights your skills, experiences and career goals, and actively engage with industry influencers and thought leaders by sharing



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content, participating in discussions and connecting with people in your field.

Volunteering for industry-related events, community service projects or nonprofit organizations is a great way to meet like-minded professionals, gain valuable experience, and give back to your community. Consider joining professional organizations, clubs or associations in your field, where you can network with peers, attend workshops

and seminars, and access resources and opportunities for professional development.

Offer Value and Be Genuine

Networking is not just about making connections — it's about building mutually beneficial relationships based on trust, respect and authenticity. Approach networking with a genuine interest in getting to know people, understanding their

needs and goals and offering value wherever you can. Be a good listener, ask thoughtful questions and follow up with people you meet to nurture and maintain your connections over time.

After networking events or meetings, follow up with your new contacts to express gratitude, reinforce your connection and explore potential opportunities for collaboration or further discussion. Keep in touch with your network regularly by sending personalized messages, sharing relevant articles or resources and offering assistance or support whenever possible.

Networking can open doors to new opportunities, support career growth and enhance professional success for recent graduates. Remember that networking is a long-term investment in your future, so be patient, persistent and proactive in building and maintaining your network over time.

Traditions and Modern Practices

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

High school graduation ceremonies are steeped in tradition and symbolism, serving as a rite of passage for students transitioning from one phase of their lives to the next.

Over the years, these ceremonies have evolved significantly, reflecting changes in society, education and cultural norms.

History

The origins of high school graduation ceremonies can be traced to medieval universities, where students were awarded degrees in formal ceremonies known as commencements. These early ceremonies often included processions, academic regalia, and the conferral of degrees by university officials.

Over time, these

traditions were adopted by secondary schools. In the U.S., graduation ceremonies in the 1900s included events for the graduating seniors, according to Jostens. These included senior plays, banquets, picnics or sometimes even outdoor hikes and backpacking trips.

"Pomp and Circumstance," the most commonly played processional, was written for the coronation of King Edward VII of Great Britain, according to History.com. In 1905, Yale bestowed an honorary degree on the song's composer and played it for the graduation, a practice that was picked up by other schools.

Etiquette

Graduation ceremonies are formal events. Students are expected to dress appropriately, typically

wearing caps and gowns in school colors. Guests should dress tastefully and refrain from disruptive behavior during the ceremony.

It is customary for attendees to arrive early, silence cell phones and remain seated. Applause and cheering are encouraged at appropriate times, such as when graduates receive their diplomas, but excessive noise should be avoided out of respect for others and the proceedings.

Some schools limit the number of guests each graduate can have at the ceremony. Jostens recommends inviting one person from each wing of the family or coming up with a creative solution such as drawing names.

Components

While specific elements

of graduation ceremonies vary from school to school, several common components include:

1. Processional. The ceremony begins with a formal procession of graduates, faculty and school officials entering the venue to the accompaniment of music.

2. Welcome address. A school administrator or faculty member delivers a welcome address, greeting attendees and setting the tone for the ceremony.

3. Student speakers. Graduation ceremonies often feature speeches by student representatives, such as class valedictorians or student council members, reflecting on their experiences and offering words of inspiration to their peers.

4. Presentation of diplomas. Graduates are individually called to

the stage to receive their diplomas or certificates, often accompanied by handshakes or congratulatory remarks from school officials.

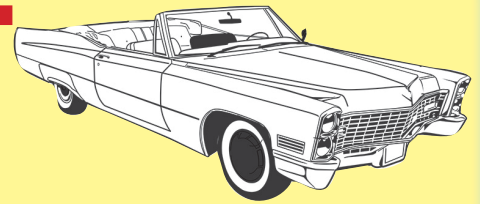
5. Commencement address. A keynote speaker, typically a distinguished guest or prominent community member, delivers a commencement address, offering words of wisdom and encouragement to the graduating class.

6. Turning of the tassel. At the conclusion of the ceremony, graduates participate in the symbolic turning of the tassel on their mortarboard hats, signifying their transition from students to alumni.

7. Recessional. The ceremony concludes with a formal recessional, as attendees exit the venue to the accompaniment of music.



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