Westlake Honors the Past, Celebrates the Future at Graduation

The Class of 2017 of Westlake High School capped off graduation season in Charles County on June 3. Honoring 271 seniors, the school celebrated the past and present, while looking toward the future.

“Change is not easy for anyone, but the only way to grow is through change,” Chrystal Benson, principal of Thomas Stone High School, said. Benson was the principal of Westlake from 2006 to 2016. “Change is the only thing in our lives that is constant,” she said.

Joseph Carter, the class valedictorian, spoke of what high school has taught him. Aside from academics, he has learned that hard work pays off. Sacrifices must be made to attain goals; everyone has a point of view; and time is not guaranteed.

“Life is short,” Carter said. “We must fill our time with the important things and never let our view of the present be pessimistic. The choices we make in these years are crucial; we must do all we can to make the right decisions.” After graduation, Carter will embark on a two-year mission with the Church of Latter-day Saints. He then plans to study mechanical engineering at Brigham Young University.

The role of salutatorian at Westlake was shared by Carter’s twin brother, Charles, and Sequoia Mack.

Charles Carter urged his classmates to take what they learned at Westlake and build on it. “It is important that we continue to show the perseverance that we have demonstrated thus far, and we will be able to achieve the goals that we have set for our future,” said Charles Carter, who will study mechanical engineering at Brigham Young.

Mack remembered the work she and her friends put in to make it to high school graduation. Long nights, headaches, doubts and fears were nowhere in sight Saturday night. Instead, there are challenges and triumphs in front of the members of the class. “The future ahead of us is a mystery and life will throw us into unforeseen circumstances, but we must be courageous and push on,” said Mack, who will head to University of Maryland College Park to major in international relations and Spanish. “Do not settle for mediocrity because you are too scared to try to achieve a goal that could be hard to reach. I do not want any of you to be thinking to yourself, 20 years or so from now, that you are not satisfied with the life you live, knowing that you did not try to achieve the life you wanted to live.”

Westlake Principal Michael Meiser asked the graduates to not be daunted by obstacles and challenges, but to take them on and complete their journey. “Life is too short to look back,” he said. “Always look to the future.”

Before diplomas were conferred, a moment of silence was held for four members of the senior class who died this school year. The late Caleb Horne, Reuel Hicks, Colin Bipat and Desmond Cooke were honored.

Members of Westlake’s Class of 2017 earned more than $7.6 million in scholarship money this year.

Photos from all graduations, including Westlake, are available to view on the school system website at http://www.ccboe.com/graduation2017.php.