

Home
Business & Real Estate
Arts
Food & Wine
Sports
Outdoors
Commentary
Obituaries
Letters
Legals
Fiction
Listings & Events
Movies
Blogs
Local History
Real Estate Listings
East Hampton Weather
Marine Weather
Media Kit

Search & Forms
FAQs/Contact Us

© Copyright 1996-2009

The East Hampton Star

153 Main Street

East Hampton, NY 11937

Emotions Run High at Hayground School

Some of the graduates grieve over the move to less 'cool' schools

By Kate Maier

(06/14/2007) Graduations, or “end of the year celebrations” as they are called at the Hayground School, are usually emotional events. But the ceremony honoring 10 eighth-grade students at the Bridgehampton private school, in which the tight-knit community saw off the bulk of what had many years ago been its first nursery school class, may have been the most tearful graduation yet.



Kate Maier Photos

Susan Ringo and her husband, Barry Sonnenfeld, both founders of the Hayground School, watched their daughter, Chloe Sonnenfeld, graduate on Friday.

“In case you can’t feel it in the air, today is a monumental day here at Hayground,” said Perry Burns, the master of ceremonies and a former Hayground teacher on Friday, as a student passed out handkerchiefs emblazoned with the school’s name to the crowd. “I won’t lie to you folks,” he said, anticipating the series of emotional speeches that were soon to follow. “It’s going to be a rough day.”



The ceremony opened with a performance by Hoss Hed Juju, a musical group led by Tiye Giraud, a musician who has visited the school to work with the students as a guest artist for the past decade. Ms. Giraud had written the song, “Oracle,” and dedicated it to the graduates. Spoken-word poetry lilted over the low, minor tones of violin and cello, eventually giving way to an upbeat, Gypsy-



Sara Salaway, the daughter of Toni Ross and the late Jeff Salaway, Hayground founders, graduated from the school Friday. With her were her brother, Noah Salaway, and their aunt, Liz Salaway.

inspired song in which Ms. Giraud exclaimed: “I am the provocateur, I am the navigator.”

After the opening song, the 10 students — who sat in a crescent around a shallow stone circle dedicated to one of the school’s founders, the late Jeff Salaway — were honored in a speech by one of their teachers. Then the

graduates took the stage, tearfully reflecting on their experiences at the school that some of them had attended for 10 years.

Several of the school’s founders, including Toni Ross, Roy Scheider, and Barry Sonnenfeld, were in the audience. For Ms. Ross and Mr. Sonnenfeld, it was a particularly momentous day: They each had a daughter in the graduating class. Mr. Sonnenfeld, who had offered a \$10 donation to the school for each time his name was mentioned, sat dressed in a purple suit and white cowboy hat as the ceremony proceeded, provoking attention from the audience each time a student or teacher said his name.

Teachers including Liz Bertsch, Arjun Achuthan, and Jon Snow delivered emotional speeches about the children, sometimes expressing their thoughts in poetry or song. They recounted milestones and past projects, and proudly showed off the students’ ability to process information in ways that children at more conventional schools might not be able to do.

Morgana Keller-Tetherow, one of the graduates who had been at the school since the beginning, was the first student to be honored. “People often say that school shapes a student,” said Mr. Achuthan, one of her teachers. “I would argue that Morgana shaped her school.”

Morgana, when she spoke, said she would miss many things about Hayground, including: the couches, being able to draw during class readings, calling teachers by their first names, and “the fact that you can go barefoot all day, regardless of how smelly your feet are.”

During the speeches, smaller children played mischievously on the lawn, barefoot games of tag setting a backdrop to the graduates’ stories.

Hayground was praised as a place where differences are celebrated and creativity is embraced. The students’ stories varied from tearful to hilarious. “Have you ever met



Lucie Kessler looked on as her classmate Soren Hope accepted flowers, a hug, and a graduation scroll from one of the younger students.

that one kid who knows the capital of Mongolia but doesn't know how to microwave a pizza?" Asked Marley Kraft during his speech. "That's me."

When Luis Alfaro showed up at the nursery school, he said, he was 3 years old and didn't speak a word of English. Now, having been immersed in Hayground culture for such a long time, he said, he understood that Southampton High School will be different. "I appeal to all people to extend this way of life, to make the world a better place to live."

Aluna Yacoe was praised by Jon Snow, who teaches art at the school, as a joyous person whose artistic creations including her "saucy, cheeky puppets" that "jump out of her hands like characters from a story." She admitted that the transition to high school will bring her some sadness. "Sorry to all the schools the kids are going to next year," she said. "They're not going to be as cool as Hayground."

The student speeches turned tearful when Sara Salaway took the stage. Her father, Jeff Salaway, one of the school's founders, was killed in a car accident in 1997. "I want to thank everyone for making my dad's dream come true," she said. "Be assured this will not be the last you see of us. We are a family, and families stay in touch."

After the ceremony, Ms. Bertsch echoed that sentiment. "As you see," she said, "the circle gets bigger, because the previous graduates come back." Many former students visit the school or work at the Hayground summer camp.

This year, Ms. Bertsch said, with the first prekindergarten class graduating, "that's like your longitudinal study of how education at Hayground works."

The day closed with a poem and song from the Thunderbird Sisters, a trio of musicians from the Shinnecock Nation (Tina Tarrant, Rebecca Ginia, and Holly Haile-Davis). "When the noise of the world becomes deafening, sing the most beautiful song your parents taught you, and teach it to your children so they may sing it when they need it most," said Ms. Haile-Davis, before launching into a song called "Persistence of Memory."

As for whether the students will be able to function well in a more conventional setting, no one seemed particularly worried. "I think they'll be fine, because they have a real solid community, they're really grounded in who they are and what they're capable of, and they're ready to launch," said Susan Ringo, one of the school's founders.

Tanya Willock, one of the departing students, summed up her Hayground experience as she ended her graduation speech. "I've learned how to learn and how to love to learn," she said. "When I first came here, I didn't want to stay. Now I hate to leave."

