

THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2025 | THE RECORDER

Contributed photos



Sherry and Peyton Davidson with graduate Jaydin Dang and Superintendent Tim Forson



A celebrating Take Stock in Children graduate

# INK!, Take Stock in Children program recognizes 13 graduating seniors

#### **By Holly Tishfield**

As the school year comes to a close, Investing in Kinds (INK!) and Take Stock in Children celebrated their 2025 class of graduating seniors with a special ceremony on Monday, May 12. This year marks Take Stock in Children's 30th year of operation in the state of Florida. As the exclusive local affiliate for the statewide Take Stock in Children organization, INK! is proud to recognize its 25th graduating class of 13 exceptional students.

INK! is an educational nonprofit organization in Florida that supports the St. Johns County school district. It's recognized as the sole direct support organization for the school district, providing funding and resourcing for thousands of students and teachers. The Take Stock in Children program is an initiative geared towards providing a unique opportunity for deserving, lowincome youth through education.

"For us, this is an opportunity to help

INK! continues on Page 17



### INK!

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students break that cycle of poverty," said Cathy Newman, INK!'s executive director. "The success of hosting the program over the last 25 years and the success of helping these students across the stage for graduation is what we're celebrating."

To qualify for the Take Stock in Children program, students must meet a restricted income level. INK! works with schools to get in touch with parents at the midway point of a student's eighth-grade year to discuss the possibility of applying for — and eventually joining — the program.

If a student is accepted, they sign a contract that promises they will stay in school, stay out of trouble by remaining drug and crime-free, and maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA. Students are also required to meet regularly with their mentors to discuss college exploration, career paths and more.

Students must join before their junior year of high school to join a "cohort," of sorts, once their application has been selected. They'll remain with that cohort of fellow students until graduation in their senior year.

Some years, the program accepts more students per cohort, depending on available funding. Next year's graduating class will celebrate 21 students,



The St. Augustine Lions Club presents the Take Stock St. Johns Class of 2025 with new laptops.

compared to this year's 13 or last year's 14 students. 2025's students were among the first to enroll in Take Stock in Children post-pandemic, which explains the group's smaller numbers.

All graduates from the program are awarded a two-year scholarship to any Florida state college or technical college of their choice. This year, The St. Augustine Lions Club also presented the Take Stock in Children St. Johns Class of 2025 with new laptops. From 2025's graduating class, all 13 students from various schools across St. Johns County will continue their education at different institutions across the state.

Some students chose major universities such as the University of Florida and Florida State University, and others chose state colleges such as Florida State College at Jacksonville and Daytona State College. One student, who earned a 3.9 GPA while in high school, is pursuing

technical certification through First Coast Technical College.

"What we want the students and families to learn is that we're there to help answer questions and we're ready to give information about what the next steps look like," Newman said of her hope for the graduating class. "Also, when the students go off to the next chapter of postsecondary education, we want them to know they have a group of people behind them always cheering them on."

## CONGRATULATIONS CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2025 You did it! Wishing you all every success in your future endeavors.



#### WE ARE SO PROUD OF OUR GRADUATES





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A fully accredited flagship K-12 school educating more than 300 students this Fall in robust classical Christian education. A huge thank you to our community and the wider St. Augustine community for their love and support.

# Tips for throwing an unforgettable graduation party

#### **By Holly Tishfield**

It's time to celebrate the graduating seniors! The class of 2025 is ready to take their first steps into the big, wide world. We sat down with Seri Kertzner, chief party officer and founder of The Social Society (your home for all of those graduation party needs), to make sure you've got every tool in your arsenal to make your grad's party truly unforgettable. Because every grad deserves a celebration as big as their dreams!

#### Tip 1: Go all-out with balloons

Who wouldn't love an eye-catching balloon garland in their new school's colors? Or letter balloons spelling out their school's acronym, like "UNF" or "FSU." Don't be afraid to go a little balloon-crazy and fill the space with all sorts of "congratulations" mylar balloons or giant number balloons bringing their graduation year to life. At The Social Society, you can even order custom balloon bouquets with your grad's name, school and a fun phrase like "Here I come, UF!" or "College Bound!"



Grab colorful mylar and letter balloons for your new grad.

Maybe you want to let them know that "the world is your oyster" with jumbo gold circle balloons and vinyl letter stickers spelling out the inspirational phrase.

#### Tip 2: Create a photo-worthy backdrop

A photo-worthy backdrop is a must-have for any grad party and The Social Society makes it easy to create one that shines. Drape a shimmering fringe curtain behind a bold "Reach for the Stars" banner, or take it a step further with life-size cutouts of your grad's school logo. Or, surprise your grad with a bed party! Decorate their space with school colors, mascot-themed decor and balloon letters on the wall or bedroom window. Let them celebrate their achievement in style with a picture-perfect setup they'll want to share.

#### Tip 3: Theme the snack bar

No party is complete without finger foods and tasty drinks served in the most charming Gold Fringe Party Cups. When you stop by The Social Society, you can pick from a selection of school-inspired paper plates (like the Grad Shaped Paper Plate) and paper napkins

#### PARTY continues on Page 19



Decorate their space with a bed party.



Contributed photo Serve snacks and drinks with stylish cutlery and flatware.

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#### Party Continued from 18

(like the Grad Letter Paper Cocktail Napkins), perfect for transforming plain cutlery into something spectacular. And don't think we forgot about decorating the table, too! There's always room for a Congrats Paper Table Runner or a stylish Back to School Table Runner. The Social Society also partnered with Amy of the Gifted Boutique for college-themed snacks, swag, hats and more.

#### Tip 4: Set up a memory and advice station

As your grads set out down that untraveled road, they'll need a little advice and encouragement to



get them started. Set up a station with The Social Society's Illustrated Florida Map Notebook and colorful pens and ask your guests to write down their best piece of advice on everything from making friends in a new city to creating the perfect class schedule. You can turn the station into a photo booth with the help of a Polaroid camera, a scrapbook photo album, and some graduationthemed stickers, like the red and silver heart stickers. It'll make for an extra special keepsake.

#### Tip 5: Don't show up empty-handed

Even if you're not hosting, bringing a thoughtful gift is a great way to celebrate the grad's big moment. Start with a thoughtful graduation card (of which The Social Society has plenty) and consider a special way to let the grad know you're thinking of them. Maybe you'll pick up a Homesick candle in the "New Grad" scent or maybe you're leaning more towards a Brass Monkey Hidden Agenda Undated Mini Planner, to help them keep track of sports meets and classes now that they'll be doing it on their own. Maybe you're the kind of guest who wants to get the party started with Multicolour Star Confetti Small Crackers or 12-inch Deluxe Sparklers. Throwing a great grad party doesn't have to be complicated — and your grad will remember the effort for years to come!

TRIBUTE TO THE CLASS OF 2025 19

#### BIG **DREAMS**. BRIGHT **FUTURES**. **BEST WISHES!**

Wherever you go from here, may the memories, lessons and friendships you've gained accompany you every step of the way.

Congratulations on your graduation, and thanks for making this community proud. We wish you health, happiness and success today and always!

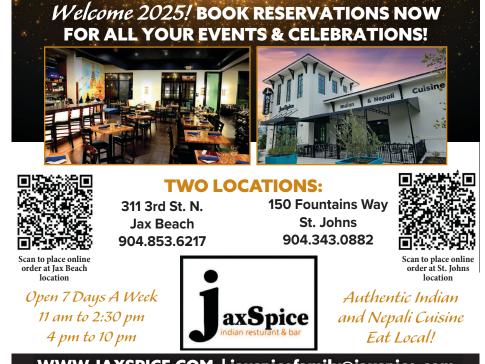


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# THE CLASS OF 2025!

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Members of Episcopal School of Jacksonville's Class of 2025 were admitted into the following colleges and universities:

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Saint Louis University, Madrid Samford University Santa Fe College Sarah Lawrence College Savannah College of Art and Design Seton Hall University Sewanee: The University of the South Siena College Smith College Southern Methodist University Stephens College Stetson University Suffolk University Syracuse University Tallahassee State College Temple University Texas A&M University Texas Christian University The Ohio State University The University of Alabama The University of Tampa The University of Tennessee (Knoxville) The University of West Florida Trinity College Dublin Tulane University of Louisiana United States Military Academy at West Point United States Naval Academy University of Arizona University of British Columbia University of California (Los Angeles) University of California (San Diego) University of California (Santa Barbara) University of Central Florida University of Colorado Boulder University of Connecticut University of Denver University of Florida University of Georgia University of Glasgow University of Groningen University of Iowa University of Kansas University of Kentucky University of Maryland (College Park) University of Massachusetts (Amherst) University of Memphis University of Miami University of Michigan University of Mississippi University of Nevada (Reno)

University of North Carolina at Asheville University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University of North Carolina at Charlotte University of North Carolina Wilmington University of North Dakota University of North Florida University of North Georgia University of Notre Dame University of Oklahoma University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh) University of Richmond University of South Carolina University of South Florida (Main Campus) University of South Florida (St Petersburg) University of Southern California University of St Andrews University of Toledo University of Utah University of Vermont University of Virginia (Main Campus) University of Washington (Seattle Campus) Utah Tech University Valdosta State University Vassar College Villanova University Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Wake Forest University Washington and Lee University Waynesburg University Western Carolina University Western Michigan University William Paterson University of New Jersey Wingate University Wofford College Yale University



Age one to grade 12 www.esj.org

# CLASS OF 2025 TOSSES CAPS

St. Johns County high schools celebrated the graduating class of 2025 last week. Below are photos compiled from several students at Ponte Vedra High, Nease High and Beachside High who shared special moments with family and friends during and after the ceremonies.

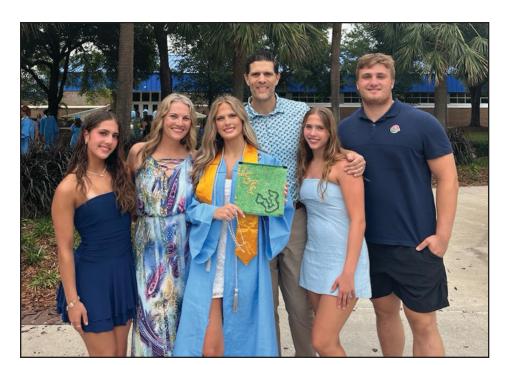














Contributed photos



## Flagler College's class of 2025 makes history

Flagler College celebrated the academic and personal accomplishments of more than 560 graduates in the class of 2025 with a commencement ceremony on May 10 at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre.

This year's graduating class is the largest in the college's history. The class brought experiences and perspectives from across the country and world, with 18 international students and domestic students from 34 states and one U.S. territory.

The most represented majors among the graduating seniors were business administration (57), psychology (54), coastal environmental science (44), criminology (41), sport management (39), graphic design (30), marketing (27), digital media production and journalism (23), and hospitality and tourism management (23).

The class of 2025 was conferred 441 Bachelor of Arts, nine Bachelor of Fine Arts and 114 Bachelor of Science degrees. Additionally, five students received Master of Arts degrees. Each of these degrees represents rigorous academic journeys successfully completed, a testament to their hard work and dedication.

For the first time this year, three students received a Master of Public Administration degree. These three students



represent the first graduating class from Flagler's Master of Public Administration program launched in the summer of 2024. Behind these degrees are countless experiential learning opportunities, in which 90% of the graduating class participated during their time at Flagler.

complete Flagler's Core experience, a groundbreaking general education program focused on the college's core values and the skills and literacies employers are looking for. More than a third of this year's gradu-

ating class has displayed high academic achievement and will graduate with honors: 77 students qualified for cum laude (GPA of 3.5-3.64), 75 qualified for magna cum laude (GPA of 3.65-3.79), and 38 qualified for summa cum laude (GPA of 3.8-4.0).

Among the graduates, 107 are studentathletes. Nineteen students completed Flagler's honors program and will have an honors designation placed on their official academic transcripts. These students were among the 5% of their class invited to join the program during their freshman year.

Flagler's class of 2025 also marks a significant milestone in the institution's history with the graduation of Cam Buttrick, the first grandchild of a Flagler alumnus to earn a degree from the college. Her grandfather, Pete Buttrick, graduated in 1973, and now, more than five decades later. Cam continues the family's enduring legacy to the Flagler community.



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## Veritas Classical School graduates first class

#### **By Anthony Richards**

It is graduation season and Veritas Classical School in St. Augustine celebrated its first graduating class since the school was founded in 2017 with four students taking part in the festivities during a ceremony at Lewis Auditorium on Monday, May 19.

According to Head of School Dr. Andrew Smalley, as part of the program's rhetoric school curriculum, there is a lot of speaking and debate that students experience from ninth to 12th grade, which includes the seniors having to write a thesis and then present it in front of a crowd before then responding to questions and supporting their thesis.

"It's a monumental experience for these kids," Smalley said. "It's a huge sense of relief and accomplishment for them after doing it."

Veritas does not only feature a classical school education but also one that is centered around Christian beliefs and the Bible which is a major part of the curriculum.

The school's goal is to provide an environment where students feel accomplished and successful in their studies, even when the material is challenging.

Next year, the school is expected to have 315 students, and Smalley believes that the example the first graduating class will be to the younger students is something that will be very powerful.

"They're the pioneers and they've helped lay the path for the future to follow," Smalley said.

He came into his role as head of school in 2021 and to see the first graduating class walk across stage after the school was founded eight years ago was a pre-



Graduates from Veritas Classical School throw their caps in the air to celebrate.

Photo courtesy of Veritas Classical School

cious moment to him, especially knowing how much work the students had put in over the years.

"It's been a labor of love," Smalley said. "There is so much maturing that goes on from ninth to 12th grade. Families recognize that it is some rigorous education, but it is worth it because it makes all the difference." According to Smalley, the four graduates were awarded half of a million dollars combined worth of college scholarships.

"When these students arrive for college interviews, the typical response (from colleges) is, of course we want them to be here representing our school," Smalley said. "There is an engaging and forthrightness to them."

Through the school's classical and Christian approach to education they aim to focus on the formation of heart, mind and spirit for human flourishing, and Smalley believes the first graduating class exemplifies that in every aspect.

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