

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HIGH SCHOOLS NAME TOP STUDENTS OF THE CLASS OF 2020

Valedictorian and Salutatorian Named for Cedar Shoals, Clarke Central, and Classic City High Schools

Athens, Georgia — Clarke County School District students are continuing their academic studies at some of the most respected colleges and universities in the country.

"It is exciting to celebrate student success, especially for this group of seniors who stayed focused, despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Our valedictorians and salutations demonstrated greatness – in the classroom and their extra-curricular activities. I respect their hard work and determination," states Dr. Xernona Thomas, interim superintendent. "I congratulate all our graduates in the Class of 2020!"

Cedar Shoals High School

Valedictorian – Paula Figueroa

Ms. Paula Figueroa, the valedictorian of Cedar Shoals, is continuing her academic journey at Emory University. Active on and off-campus in student government, service clubs, and volunteer organizations, she also conducted research at the Tsai Lab Genetics Department, as part of the "Young Dawgs" program at the University of Georgia. Ms. Figueroa received accolades from the National Honor Society, National Hispanic Honor Society, and was named an AP Scholar and AP Scholar with Distinction.

"My experience at Cedar Shoals was one I wouldn't change. When I first started high school, I was new to the state, and I didn't know anyone, but I came to realize how inviting, and inclusive the community was. I fell in love with my school's diversity and its constant successful fights with adversity. Cedar Shoals is where I met my closest friends, where I learned how to speak up, lead, and, most importantly, how to grow and keep going when things get tough."

"Ms. Figueroa was a joy to have in our classrooms and school community – she is charismatic, humble, and brought a wonderful spirit to Cedar," states Antonio Derricotte, principal.

Co-Salutatorian – Angela Ghimire

Cedar Shoal's co-salutatorian, Ms. Angela Ghimire, credits her involvement in the Freshman Academy Mentoring Program as having a significant influence on her future. Helping to impact the lives of other students motivated her to set higher goals and work to achieve academic success.

"The diverse and open-minded environment of Cedar Shoals allowed me to build a foundation of excellence for myself and gave me countless opportunities to strive for greatness. Cedar Shoals introduced me to so many hard-working educators and supportive peers who all contributed to helping me to reach where I am today," states Ms. Ghimire.

In addition to being named Cedar’s STAR Student, she received the Charlotte and Claude Williams American History Award, the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award. She was a member of the National Honor Society and Beta Club. Ms. Ghimire will continue her education at the University of Georgia, where she is considering pursuing a major in Biology.

“With a heart of gold, Ms. Ghimire sees the potential in the world and worked to make the school and our community better. Her spirit will continue to influence Cedar Shoals students for years to come,” states Antonio Derricotte, principal.

Co-Salutatorian – Aaliyah Hill

Ms. Aaliyah Hill, co-salutatorian at Cedar Shoals, recognized and valued how a school community could positively shape the entire student body. “Attending high school at Cedar makes you feel like you have a second family. Through the ups and downs, we always seemed to come together for the better,” states Ms. Hill.

Active in extra-curricular activities as a varsity cheerleader and a member of the Senior Advisory Board, she was named to the National Honor Society and served as president of the Sigma Alpha Pi, the National Political Science Honor Society. Ms. Hill will attend Georgia State University, with plans to major in nursing or health sciences.

“Ms. Hill was an advocate for fellow students, constantly campaigning on their behalf, and inspiring them to find their voice and seek answers. She’s a positive force and will be a success in whichever field she chooses,” states Antonio Derricotte, Cedar Shoals principal.

Clarke Central High School

Co-Valedictorian – Theron Camp

Clarke Central’s co-valedictorian, Mr. Theron Camp, is attending the University of Georgia as a Foundation Fellow, after an accomplished high school career which included being named a National Merit Finalist and the Clarke County STAR Student.

“I have only positive things to say about the people at Clarke Central. I know people say this sort of thing all the time in these situations, but I don’t think they entirely understand what it means or how uncommon it really is for people’s high school experience (and, in fact, their entire school experience) to be defined by positive and productive interactions. Looking back, four years is an awfully short time, and though I’m ready to move on to the college part of life, I don’t think I spent nearly as much time at Central as I might’ve liked.”

Mr. Theron’s extra-curricular activities included competing with the cross country and track teams, creating art, serving as the team photographer for the DC Girls’ Baseball team, and being a founding player/member of Northeast Georgia Hockey Association.

“Mr. Camp is an academically focused student-athlete who represented our school well,” states Dr. Swade Huff, principal of Clarke Central.

Co-Valedictorian – Elena Gilbertson Hall

Ms. Elena Gilbertson Hall, Clarke Central’s co-valedictorian, parlayed her high school success into acceptance from 14 post-secondary institutions (and almost \$700,000 in scholarship offers), deciding to attend the University of Chicago, with the intent to study political science and mathematics.

“Clarke Central has given me so many opportunities, including amazing teachers, classes, clubs, and extraordinarily supportive staff members and administrators,” states Ms. Gilbertson Hall. “My favorite thing about CCHS is the diverse student body, and I have learned so much from my peers over the past four years. Although our senior year didn't end as expected, I am grateful for the years I have gotten to spend with the class of 2020, and I wish all my classmates the best in the future.”

Ms. Gilbertson Hall's high school highlights include Editor-in-Chief of the ODYSSEY Media Group, 2020 Georgia Champion Journalist, Legislative Fellow for State Representative Spencer Frye, Founder of the Equal Test Prep Initiative, President of the CCHS Young Democrats Club, Co-President of the CCHS Women in STEM Club, Winner of the National Merit Scholarship, Co-Founder and Vice-Chair of the Athens Mayor's Youth Commission.

“Ms. Gilbertson Hall is a talented ambassador of Clarke Central who advocated for others through her thoughts and actions, as evident with her Equal Test Prep program to prepare students for the ACT/SAT,” states Dr. Swade Huff, principal.

Salutatorian – Lucy Yeomans

Ms. Lucy Yeomans acquired accolades in the classroom, on the concert stage, and as a record-setting athlete. As a scholar, she was named Cumulative “All-A” Honor Roll, AP Scholar with Distinction, Georgia Certificate of Merit, and National Merit Commended Scholar. A school record-holder in swimming and track and field, Ms. Yeomans led teams to state competitions, earning region and state honors. As a member of the Clarke Central Orchestra, she was named Most Valuable Player, Most Dedicated Player, and designated Concertmaster. Ms. Yeomans will attend the University of Richmond.

“I wouldn't trade my experience at Clarke Central for anything. It is such a diverse, unique school that has afforded me many opportunities,” states Ms. Yeomans.

Clarke Central's principal knows Ms. Yeomans will be successful going forward. “She worked hard as a student-athlete and positioned herself to continue finding success in both roles at the collegiate level,” states Dr. Swade Huff.

Classic City High School

“Education (and student success) isn't a ‘one size fits all’ model,” states Katrina Daniel, principal of Classic City High. “Although our valedictorian and salutatorian chose a non-traditional route to achieve their diplomas, they stayed the course and worked through many challenges and rose to the top. I am extremely proud of them and all our graduates.”

Valedictorian – Joseph Ferdina Thoyi Le Le Walker

Along with his high school diploma, Classic City's top student, Joseph Walker, received a Technical Certificate of Credit for Video Game Design Specialist, prompting aspirations to enter the field of animation after college.

“After starting school in Oregon then moving from Mississippi to Athens, my educational experience took a different turn. I came to Classic City to get ahead with my credits. I remained focused and even took advantage of academic opportunities to gain college credits,” states Mr. Walker. “The experiences I had going to a non-traditional school made it worth my while because attending Classic City and taking college courses through Athens Tech at ACCA gave me real-world practice for my future in college and life. I had the opportunity to feel the freedom and responsibility that comes with having entire sections of the day where I had no classes. The friends

I made came from different grade levels and experiences, and we were all able to connect as equals. I wouldn't change it for the world. As a result of taking a non-traditional route, putting in hard work, and making genuine connections, I know that my future in animation will be bright.”

“Joseph is one of a kind. His thinking is atypical of students his age – he thinks outside of the box but has realistic visions. Joseph takes advantage of opportunities to encourage others and is on the right track to accomplish future goals. I know success is in his future and can't wait to see how he brightens up the world,” states Katrina Daniel, principal of Classic City.

Salutatorian

Melissa Campbell

Classic City's salutatorian decided to go to Classic City to experience a different educational environment, seeking smaller class sizes and an accelerated pace. Ms. Melissa Campbell utilized Classic City's college and career resources to help her decide to continue her education and train to be a medical assistant.

“Classic City allowed me to open up more and be myself. If it weren't for the amazing teachers, I would not be in this position today to graduate a year early. They all continued to encourage me, along with my wonderful mother,” states Ms. Campbell. “I am proud to be the salutatorian of Classic City's Class of 2020!”

“Melissa is honest, caring, and very compassionate about doing her best,” states Katrina Daniel, Classic City principal. “She worked hard and accomplished her goal by finishing a year ahead of schedule – proving when you stay focused, set goals, and work hard, all things are possible!”

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