

Northern Minnesota town honors senior class on Main Street

Just like every other community across the country, high school seniors in Fertile, Minn., won't be able to walk across the stage on graduation day. That's why the community decided to bring the stage outside.

Written By: Matt Henson | May 7th 2020 - 11pm.

Volume 90%

FERTILE, Minn. — The mile-long drive through downtown Fertile looks a little different these days, but it's not because many businesses are closed due to the coronavirus.

All 35 members of Fertile-Beltrami High School's 2020 class have a banner on light poles along the main drag through town.

"We don't have our graduation, but they are still looking to make us feel special and not forgotten about," said senior Chayz Nelson.

The idea started when a member of the city council saw a picture from a town in Virginia that did something similar to honor its student-athletes.

"We love our kids, and just wanted to do something special for them," said Fertile city councilwoman Linda Widrig.

The city and fire department came up with the \$2,200 needed to put the pictures on the banners. Brander Printing of Crookston, Minn., then printed them.

"It's definitely nice seeing my face on a banner next to all my friends, it makes me feel like I am not alone," said senior Lexi Swenby.

After keeping it a secret for nearly a week, the city public works department hung the banners. They will remain on the light poles until Memorial Day and will then be given to the seniors for a keepsake.

"I haven't seen everyone in a while because of the whole quarantine thing," said senior Cajsá Clarke. "Seeing everybody's faces up on the banners makes me feel at home again."

Senior Alissa Lundeen said her banner has made her a local celebrity of sorts at the gas station where she works.

"I think it's cool — people we don't even know help us feel loved during this time," she said, remembering a positive encounter with a customer.

The seniors admit the banners won't replace the ceremony itself, especially for Clarke, whose dad is the superintendent and hands out the diplomas.

"It's not quite the same, but everybody is trying, though it's not as special as it could have been," she said.

The town is proud of the senior class, Widrig said, and members of the class of 2020 are proud of where they grew up.

"It's really special to me because people can see I'm from Fertile," Swenby said.