

Community Comment
June 9, 2015

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

Last Friday evening I was tired—and I was grouching to myself for having made plans for the night. I just wanted to go home after work.

Instead, I kept my commitment to go to the Latino Students graduation at Fortuna High School. Our exchange student Lujan was participating and I had promised to attend.

Boy, am I glad I kept that commitment.

The evening was glorious and exciting and had me in tears through most of it.

This year Fortuna High School held its very first Latino and Indigenous graduation. This was a week before the full school graduation that is happening this Friday.

Rather than having the sense of cultural separation, the evening actually created a feeling of unity. I felt honored to be in the audience of such a special event.

Festive music from Mexico greeted us when we walked in. The stage was set with about three dozen chairs, and a table was front and center with a Humboldt State banner and bookended with soccer balls. There were brightly colored sashes with traditional Mexican patterns on a round table to the left, families with little kids were already seated in the theater and balloons dotted the interior.

This night was the brainchild of Marysol, who came to Fortuna High last fall as an HSU grad student to shadow the counselors. She mentioned to

administration that additional graduations for Latino students were commonplace at several colleges and universities—and would Fortuna High be interested in being the first in Humboldt County to have one.

Luckily for us, administration said yes.

One purpose of a Latino graduation is to help the Spanish speaking family members feel a part of the process. They can understand the proceedings and feel more involved.

The first order of business was a signing ceremony. Senior Samuel Licona was signing his letter of intent to play soccer at HSU. He was flanked by his proud family—and his entire soccer team. He is the first soccer player from Fortuna to sign at this level of collegiate play.

This is a special year for Fortuna High Latinos for a couple of more reasons. First, the valedictorian is Latino. Alan. I remember Alan when was 8, 9, and 10 years old. I knew he was special then—so grown up for his age, but funny and personable to adults at the same time. Great young man.

And Rotary's outbound exchange student from last year—Doris Gonzales. Doris spent a year in France her Junior year and came back to finish her senior year at Fortuna High. Doris has been awarded a full ride scholarship to Brown University. She plans on going to medical school. I'm over the moon excited for her.

I don't have enough time to tell you all the reasons that the evening was so special. It was moving and inspiring and I'm so proud of Fortuna High.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.