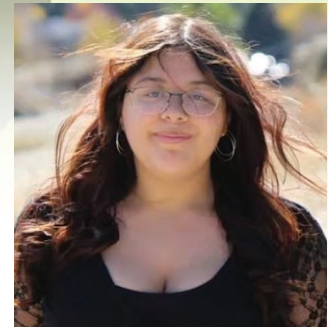


2026 Valleydictorian

SENIOR SEARCH

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



BILLINGS GAZETTE
COMMUNICATIONS



SEE THIS YEAR'S \$5,000 WINNER

FORGING THEIR OWN FUTURE



ANOTHER SCHOOL YEAR IS COMING TO AN END.

For our 2026 seniors, this also marks the beginning of a new chapter of life. While some graduates go on to pursue a degree from a traditional college or university, others decide to continue their education through trade school, Industry certification, or apprenticeship. Post grad success can take many forms. For this reason, Valley Credit Union wanted to help students who are not typically eligible for scholarships and financial aid awarded to those attending a 4-year program.

Throughout the 2025-2026 school year, Valley Credit Union and The Billings Gazette have featured 12 seniors chosen from local area high schools. These students, nominated by a teacher, counselor, or principal, have shown a clear career path for their future in the form of an industry certification, technical associate degree, city college, trade school, or apprenticeship. As the school year comes to an end, Valley has awarded one \$5,000 grant to a deserving student.

Students shared with us their inspirations, their career goals, and their plans following high school. From

culinary school to electricians, our featured seniors show much potential in their future endeavors across a wide variety of industries. Valley is honored to play a part in helping financially support a driven student in the field of their choice. The future is very bright for our Class of 2026 graduates!

Valley Credit Union is proud to be involved in many community sponsorships, especially ones supporting Billings' youth. Most recently, Valley Credit Union presented The Hive a contest for local high school entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas, awarding \$5,000 to 1st place to help get their business going. Valley also continues our commitment to the Billings area kids with a \$15,000 title sponsorship of the Billings All High School graduation celebrations following the graduation ceremonies.

Congratulations to each and every one of our 12 Valleydictorian featured students as you get ready to graduate and embark on your next journey. Thank you to all high school faculty for your nominations and to the graduates for sharing with us your interests, your goals, and your stories.

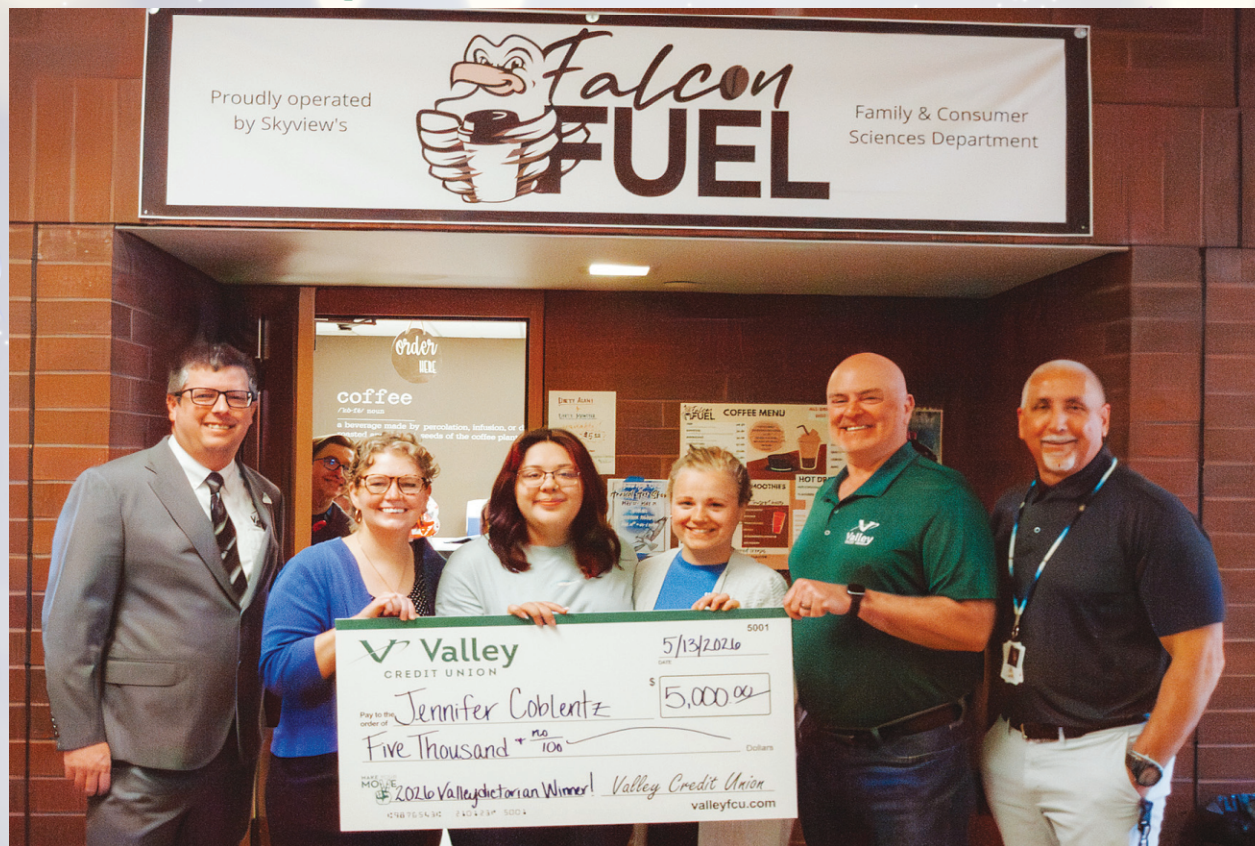
valleyfcu.com



FEDERALLY INSURED BY NCUA

CONGRATULATIONS JENNIFER COBLENTZ

2026 *Valleydictorian*  \$5000 Winner



Jennifer Coblentz poses for a picture with a check for \$5,000 from Valley Credit Union at Skyview High School. Jennifer was selected from over 50 nominated students and 12 finalists to be named the class of 2026 Valleydictorian. Along with the title she received a \$5,000 check from Valley Credit Union to further her education. Jennifer plans to attend Flathead Valley CC to get a degree in culinary arts. Also pictured above are Brandon Scala and Matt Macrow from Valley Credit Union and Lindsay Hubbert, Ashley Koss, and Jay Wahl from Skyview High School.

Kyra Butler

High School: Custer High School

What are your plans after high school?

My plans after high school are to attend cosmetology school. I am planning to attend at Opal Academy in Billings, Montana. I will be hoping to start my schooling the Fall of 2026. Opal Academy is such a great fit for me. The placing of the school is a great area and the people that run it are very nice and always willing to help.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class is Criminal Justice. During the start of the year, I knew I was going to enjoy this class just knowing I was going to be looking into all the crimes and why those people do what they do. I chose this class as my favorite class because it is a very interesting class to learn about. Being able to learn about all the crazy and eye-catching crimes in today's world is mind blowing. Criminal Justice is a class where you learn all about what happens to the people that commit crimes, try hiding from the crime they did, theft, and murders.

Who inspires you and why?

The main person that inspires me is my mom. My mom is a huge role model in my life. She has never failed to put a smile on my face and others. For someone to do that it takes a huge heart and a loving soul. Most people can not stand to make others happy, for her to be able to do that on a daily is a huge thing. My mother is a very talented and loving person, she will help anyone that comes her way the best she can. However, she would do anything and everything for anyone she possibly could. When I grow up if I get to be half the person she is today that would be a huge achievement that I had to conquer in my lifetime.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

A few things I enjoy on the outside of school is spending quality time with my friends and family, my animals and fishing and hunting. Being able to spend as much quality time as I do with my family and friends always mean so much to me because it is never a dull moment and there is always so much laughter that goes on during those times. Another huge one to me is spending time with my pets. My goat named Pickles is such a ball of craziness, she is always running around, wanting scratches, always wanting to sit between your legs, and she loves her food. Pickles is most definitely my little fur baby. Hunting and fishing I have

done ever since I could. I really enjoy doing those activities because I get to be out in the nature and doing those things with the people I love.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

If I win the \$5,000 grant, I will put that money into helping me pay for my schooling to get my certificate for cosmetology. Being able to use this money for my schooling would help me out a ton in the long run. Whatever money is left over I will be using that towards helping my clients, buying products, and starting my own booth.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

My personal inspirational saying is "Practice not Perfection". This saying always keeps me going when I am trying to do a task on a daily and that task is not going to be perfect, I just always just think all I can do is practice and later on it will turn into something that may be close to perfection that will satisfy me, but it will never be perfect. As long as I keep trying and doing my best the rest does not matter.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

If I were stranded on a desert island I would bring starting fluid or a lighter, first aid kit, and a knife or a tool. The reason behind on why I will be bringing those specific things is because first off the fluid or lighter is because then I can cook my food, have some heat, and I can also use that as a signal to get rescued. Second, for the first aid kit you never know what could be in the first aid kit that could be helpful and if you had gotten a major wound that needs a bandage than I would have that right on hand. Lastly, is the knife or a tool these two things are pretty helpful because if you need to cut down wood, cut up food, and use it as self defense than you would have it right on hand.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

If I had to choose between a hamburger and a pizza I would choose a hamburger just for the simple fact I can put cheese, lettuce, bacon, tomatoes, onions, mustard, ketchup and pickles. All of these things would just melt in your mouth with all of those seasonings.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?



How I see AI impacting my career in the next 5 years is I won't have to be cutting hair, coloring hair, manicures, and pedicures because AI will have that under control and will do everything by themselves. It is really hard to imagine that happening just for the simple fact becoming a cosmetologist has been my dream job and something I have wanted to do ever since I was younger.

Any other information you would like to share?

I have 2 siblings an older sister and a younger brother. I have been working at the local gas station since I was a sophomore in High school, now that I am a senior in high school I open every morning before school. I am a very hard worker and always love helping other people out to my best abilities. When I played volleyball I was always a team captain for encouraging and being positive to my teammates through out the games. I was nominated for all-conference. The community has always noticed me being able to help others, always being kind and sweet to those kids that are alone, and I am always respecting those around me and the community. I have been going to Custer High School since Kindergarten.

“Practice not Perfection.”

Haylie Clark

High School: Absarokee High School

What are your plans after high school?

After high school, I will attend MSU Billings to earn my Associates of Science in Nursing through the City College. I am grateful to be able to attend an institution close to my family and the area that I am familiar with. During my high school career, I took the initiative to take dual-credit courses that will aid in my future success. I am ecstatic for this next chapter of life pursuing a career that I am passionate about.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class in the current semester is my Certified Nursing Assistant course. This class provides the basic foundations for caregiving in different facility settings. By taking this course, I am able to take steps that further my chances of acceptance into the nursing program and receive an experience that is related to the degree I am pursuing.

Who inspires you and why?

The most inspirational person in my life hands down is my older sister, Kenzie. Six years ago I watched my sister journey down the same path I am heading. Courage and grace described her the entire process regardless of the hardships she endured in nursing school. She displayed great dedication which led to my passion for nursing. I admire her ability to provide help in a selfless manner to those in trying times. It would bring me great joy to dedicate my pursuit of nursing in honor of her.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Outside of school when I am not consumed with work or academics, I take advantage of the opportunities to play a round of golf at the Columbus Golf Course and pickup games of volleyball with friends and community members.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

If I were to receive the \$5,000 grant that money would

be well spent on the necessary materials needed in the nursing program. That may include books, a stethoscope, scrubs, and any other unforeseen necessities. Often students entering college shy away from following their career paths because of financial burdens, I am optimistic that college does not have to be financially stressful. The nursing field is in high demand and it would be devastating not to be able to reach my goal because of money.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

Everyday I remind myself, "The mindset you carry shapes the life you create." This quote sets my mind to the attitude I have for the beginning of every morning. I want to be my best possible self so I tell myself to be kind, confident, and generous. By having this attitude, I have more productive days and a mindset that influences hard-work and perseverance for even the dull projects.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

If I could choose three items it would be a fire starter, Leatherman, and a pot. These three items would ensure that I have the ability to have clean water, start a fire, and a variety of tools that will be useful in increasing my chances of survival.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I can't choose between the two so I would combine them by getting a cheeseburger pizza. The flavors of cheeseburger on a pizza is the perfect combination especially compared to a basic pepperoni pizza.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

The usage of artificial intelligence in my career and life will increase substantially in the next 5 years. As of now AI can be a beneficial tool if used appropriately, however in the healthcare field I predict the usage will be more common in years to come. It's difficult to say the toll AI will take, however I have hope the usage of AI will benefit studies, confidence, and patient care.



Any other information you would like to share?

I am thankful for the opportunity to share this information to the Billings Gazette and Valley Credit Union and the honor to apply for this scholarship. Thank you.

“The mindset you carry shapes the life you create.”

Jennifer Coblentz

High School: Billings Skyview High School

What are your plans after high school?

After high school, I plan to attend Gallatin College in Bozeman to build a foundation in culinary arts and develop my skills as a chef. However, my long-term goal is to eventually become a culinary instructor myself so I can share my knowledge, mentor future chefs, and be able to give back to the field that inspires me.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class is culinary, not for my passion for culinary arts but also because of the positive environment my instructors and classmates make. She inspires me every day to push myself, try new techniques, and reach my full potential. In this class, I get to learn and expand my culinary skills through hands-on experience – from experimenting making our own recipes to mastering the basics that every chef needs. We are able to work directly with the ingredients, tools, equipment, and some of the best chef in Montana. This class has helped me grow more confident and capable in the kitchen. My classmates also play a huge role in making this class so meaningful. They bring creativity, positivity, support, and a sense of teamwork that you can't find in another class. This class is set up for us to learn from each other, encourage one another, and share the excitement of our achievements together. Through this class, I've discovered not just how to cook, but how to be patient, detail-oriented, and proud of what I create. Most importantly, it has shown me that I'm capable of so much more than I ever realized.

Who inspires you and why?

My biggest inspirations by far are my culinary instructors, Mrs. Koss and Mrs. Hubbert. They are like my sense of reason, but they also encourage me to bend the rules a little and dream bigger than I ever would have on my own – especially Koss. Both of them show such passion and love for their classes that it makes you want to show up every single day. No matter what, Koss is always there to support her students. She always says she's "behind us 110% in whatever we decide", and she truly means it. She believes in our abilities even when we doubt ourselves, and she constantly looks out for our best interests.

I've had many great teachers, but she stands out because of the amount of support, dedication, and genuine care she shows for both her students and her job. From cracking jokes when you're having a rough day to cheering so loudly that you forget anyone else is even watching, she brings a kind of energy that makes you feel seen and valued. I've taken many of her classes, not just culinary, and she brings the same passion and love to every single one. Even when she was going through a difficult time in her personal life, she still showed up for my team and cheered for us like nothing else mattered. She is someone I will always look up to – someone I hope to become one day, and someone I truly hope everyone gets the chance to meet.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Outside of school I enjoy photography and art. These are things I have done since I was little and have influenced me to join clubs and activities to be able to show my love for them to others.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

Winning the \$5,000 would make a huge difference in my goals to becoming a chef. It would allow me to focus mainly on my education without the stress of financial burdens. Culinary requires hands-on learning and the use of special tools, and constant work. So being able to cover my tuition into Gallatin and pay for my school kit and textbooks right out of the gate would give the sole ability to focus on developing skills.

A scholarship could also open doors for me to jump at every opportunity available like extra labs, workshops, or even advanced classes.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

"The only time you should ever look back is to see how far you've come." This is a quote from one of my favorite artists, I'm not sure exactly how he meant for this to be understood but I see it as a way of appreciating the hurt and struggle from which you came from and to be proud of just how far you've come.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a weapon. Something I could use to protect myself but also to create and build with. Next, I would



bring a lighter in order to cook and keep warm. Lastly, I would bring another person, someone I could talk with and keep each other sane and sense of hope that we will survive and hopefully someone will rescue us.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I would choose pizza with just plain cheese. If possible, I would like stuffed crust. My only reason is that's what I like.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I don't really see AI taking over my career anytime soon. I'm sure it will eventually but as of right now I think it could be useful in costing, numbers, and inventory.

Any other information you would like to share?

Just that I am really thankful for this opportunity and that there are scholarships like this out there for people who may not choose to take a traditional path into college and the work force.

“The only time you should ever look back is to see how far you’ve come.”

Kim Seok-jin

Jace Dostal

High School: Billings Senior High School

What are your plans after high school?

Attend Montana State University Billings to get an Associate degree in Cyber Security/Network Support. After that I plan on using that degree to get a job related to Cyber Security, although I am currently unsure whether I will be looking mainly inside of Montana or looking out of state for a job.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

I love being in Symphonic Band at Senior. It is my 3rd year being in Symphonic and it is very noticeable of how much I have improved at playing the Trombone from Sophomore year to now. I really enjoy the difficulty of music we are playing and it is awesome to play these difficult pieces with my friends.

Who inspires you and why?

My band teacher, Mr. McKenzie. He is always hard working to help both himself and all of us students improve in the field of music. No matter what happens and whatever goes wrong he always keeps a happy demeanor around his students and always uses mistakes as an opportunity to improve.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

I enjoy playing video games both by myself and with my friends. I love playing various board games with my family when we have family game nights. I loved playing sports as I grew up. I've played a few years of basketball, football, and soccer, but I loved playing Little League baseball when I was younger.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

I plan on using the grant to help with paying for my classes to help alleviate some of my student loan debt post-graduation and helping to pay for anything I need for class supplies.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

One of the mottos that I heard when I was younger that stuck with me comes from "Meet the Robinsons". The key

motto that keeps showing up is "Keep Moving Forward". While I don't perfectly follow this, I try my best to learn from my mistakes and move on from there.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

The first thing would be the biggest encyclopedia I could find on surviving on an island. A small contraption to desalinate salt water into drinkable water. And a small supply of food to last until I figure out a source of food on the island itself.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I would say just a plain cheese pizza. I don't like putting a lot of extra things on my food and generally keep different parts of a meat separate (like the main food, veggies, and a side if it is there are all separate). I think it is just mostly a texture thing for me.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I don't see AI replacing the jobs of Human Cybersecurity experts at all. Or, at the very least, they won't be replacing jobs in a broad sense. Cybersecurity is just as much about protecting systems and data both digitally but also about helping with general security routines for people to follow or troubleshooting issues with hardware. I only see AI being able to handle small scale troubleshooting issues with the average person, which could work to alleviate the amount of

support needed. However, I do not see AI being able to handle large scale failures in a system as that would need a better knowledge base on the system itself rather than just a general database built upon millions of generalized data points.

Any other information you would like to share?

I volunteer with the Billings Senior High National Honors Society to help improve both the Billings Community and the Senior High Community.



“Keep Moving Forward.”

from the movie “Meet the Robinsons”

Micah Falls Down

High School: Hardin High School

What are your plans after high school?

My plans after High School is to go to college and learn how to be successful like anyone else and do things to help others and my community.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class in school is math because I've always been good at it and I always like working with numbers and problems solving.

Who inspires you and why?

My Mom inspires me because she is a strong women who knows how to get through life even when it tries to bring her down. She shows a lot of strength when it comes to taking care of me and putting food on table and a roof over my head. She shows what it means to be a strong mother.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

I enjoy having fun with friends and working on bettering myself physically and mentally.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

I will use it to help me become successful for college and as I keep learning and growing throughout my life. I will use it

so I don't have to worry about using other people's money for me to be successful.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

God is the reason why I'm here so I give him the glory because he is the reason why I have the gifts that I have and how he uses me to help others.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a boat with some gas in it to go to other places. I would have some matches to make fires. Lastly I would bring my mom.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

Pizza with pepperoni because it is just very very very good.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I would use it in educational ways to help me understand and learn more about what I'm learning.

Any other information you would like to share?

I am a Native American who just wants to be successful and helpful to others in any way possible.



“God is the reason why I’m here
so I give him the glory.”

Dillon Gehnert

High School: Reed Point High School

What are your plans after high school?

I just got a job at the airport in Big Timber as an Airfield Marshaller/ Lineman. So I will be working there right out of high school. And then after I learn more about aviation I want to start flight lessons and get my pilots license.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

Auto Shop class. It's something I am familiar with and I enjoy working on cars.

Who inspires you and why?

My Shop class teacher Mr. Smith. He has taught me so many important lessons, not just automotive knowledge. The things he has taught me are going to help me through life.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

I enjoy hiking, fishing, hunting and working on cars.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

I will use it to fund my flight lessons so I can get my pilots license.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

I don't really have a personal motto or inspirational saying.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a water purifier, a tent and a hatchet. The water purifier ensures that I have clean water. The tent gives me shelter and a hatchet can do many things.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I would choose a hamburger. And I would want cheese, bacon, pickles, onions and barbecue sauce on it.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I do not really see AI impacting me because I don't think there's any way for AI to be used in the field of aviation. I also avoid using AI because I think it is harmful to us and the environment.



“I enjoy hiking, fishing, hunting and working on cars.”

Craig Green

High School: Billings Senior High School

What are your plans after high school?

I plan on attending either Grand Canyon University and studying in Sports management or Montana State University Billings for Electrical Technician.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

I would choose human anatomy. I really liked the teacher, and it was very interesting to see how the human body works.

Who inspires you and why?

I would have to say my brother inspires me. He knew what he wanted to do at a young age. Working hard towards his goals to where he is currently going to school for it at the University of Oregon in Eugene. This pushes me to find my future passion and know that I can do whatever I put my mind to.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

I like to workout at the gym, hangout with family and friends, be outdoors, go to church, and watch football and basketball.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

First of all I would be extremely thankful to receive this grant. I would put this grant into furthering my education.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

Psalms 62:2

“He alone is my rock and my salvation. My fortress where I’ll never be shaken.”

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a pot, to cook things and for water. A machete to hunt and to cut things. And lastly, a tarp for shelter.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

Personally, I’m a burger type of guy. So I would have a burger with cheddar cheese, tomatoes, lettuce and ketchup.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I think AI will continue to be used heavily. However I think it won’t have any affect on my future career.

Any other information you would like to share?

I have passed the Seal of Biliteracy Test. Which certifies me as bilingual in Spanish. This will help in my future being able to further grow connections. Thank you for considering me for this grant.



DAVID JAMES DAVE@
DAVEJAMESPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

“He alone is my rock and my salvation.
My fortress where I’ll never be shaken.”

Psalms 62:2

Logan Herden

High School: Belfry High School

What are your plans after high school?

I will be going to a trade school for welding, diesel mechanic, electrician or linemen. For diesel mechanic I would likely go to UTI in Orlando, Florida. For welding I would go to Western Welding Academy in Gillette, Wyoming. For electrician and linemen I would go to Montana Tech in Butte.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

I like shop class because I am good with my hands and am able to create cool projects and work on my own things sometimes.

Who inspires you and why?

My grandpa has inspired me the most, because he started with nothing. He is also just a very nice person and helps me with anything he can.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Outside of school I enjoy working on me and my friends' vehicles, working on our dirt bikes, snowmobiles and whatever else needs fixed. I obviously also enjoy riding snowmobiles and dirt bikes. I like to play some video games when it gets dark and cold. I also enjoy hunting.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

If I win the \$5,000 grant I would use it to pay for my school directly, or help with housing for school.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

No amount of money ever bought a second of time.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a mobile Starlink, a generator and my phone, to get off of the island same day.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I would choose a hamburger, with cheese, bacon and BBQ sauce.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I think AI will be helpful to render images or diagnose problems, but I do not see it taking over any of the jobs I am interested.

Any other information you would like to share?

Just a rancher who likes things that make a lot of noise and power.



“No amount of money ever bought a second of time.”

Timmy Lien

High School: Billings Senior High School

What are your plans after high school?

I am very excited for the opportunity to play baseball and begin my degree in Business Management at Chemeketa Community College. My future career aspirations are becoming a financial advisor or selling commercial real estate. My interest in these fields stems from a desire to build long-term, trust-based relationships. I enjoy the challenge of earning someone's confidence and the reward of seeing their hard work and mine turn into tangible results.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite course is AP Physics 2, not only for its complex real-world applications but for the philosophy my instructor brings to the classroom. He fosters an environment where the classroom is a 'safe space to fail,' encouraging us to take risks and learn from our mistakes, a mindset that is essential for both scientific inquiry and personal growth. His commitment to preparing us for life beyond high school, regardless of whether our future involves physics, has made a lasting impact on how I approach challenges.

Who inspires you and why?

I have two cousins who inspire me because they have turned difficult dreams into reality, reaching the professional coaching ranks and the Division 1 baseball level. As I strive to be the best version of myself, I look to them as proof that the 'impossible' is often just a milestone waiting to be reached. Their journeys have taught me to ignore the skepticism of others and focus on the work required to succeed. As I move on to play baseball and study business in college, I carry their mindset with me: that with enough belief and effort, no goal is out of reach.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Outside of school, much of my time is dedicated to the discipline of athletic training. To pursue my goal of playing baseball professionally, I commit to daily workouts, team practices, and additional technical repetitions. When I'm not on the field, I stay active with my friends through 'folf,' basketball, and bowling. I find that these activities provide a necessary balance, allowing me to enjoy the competitive spirit of sports while building strong, lasting connections with my buddies.

“Why not me?”

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

Receiving this \$5,000 grant would be a vital investment in my transition to Chemeketa Community College, where I will be balancing the demands of a Business Management degree with the rigorous schedule of collegiate baseball. These funds will allow me to focus entirely on my academic foundation and athletic development without the immediate pressure of external financial burdens. This grant represents more than just tuition; it is the bridge that allows me to pursue excellence in the classroom and on the field as I work toward a successful career in the business sector.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

My personal motto is simple: 'Why not me?' I have always believed that the primary factor separating those who achieve their dreams from those who do not is a relentless work ethic and a commitment to self-improvement. Whenever I am faced with a challenging goal, whether it is playing collegiate baseball or pursuing a career in finance, I ask myself that question. It serves as a constant reminder that success is not reserved for a select few; it is available to anyone willing to strive to be the best version of themselves every day.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I'd go with a water filter, a machete, and a fire starter. It's the ultimate survival starter pack. The filter keeps me hydrated, the machete helps me build a home base, and the fire starter is for warmth (and the occasional beach bonfire). I'm all about being prepared, and these three tools ensure I'm ready for whatever the island throws at me.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

Definitely a hamburger. I prefer it over pizza because it's filling without leaving me feeling sluggish afterward. If I'm building the perfect burger, it's going to have melted cheddar, bacon, fresh lettuce, and mayo.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

Five years from now, I envision AI as a powerful co-pilot in my career as a financial advisor. I see it as a tool that will handle the data-heavy aspects of the job, analyzing market trends and automating routine tasks allowing me to be more efficient and precise. However, I believe the core of financial advising will remain deeply human. AI can process information, but it cannot build personal connections or offer the emotional intelligence required to navigate a client's life milestones.



Any other information you would like to share?

I always dreamed of playing college baseball; at first, I thought it was something that just happened. My junior year I was cut from a Fall Ball team, and not long after, I found out I would be playing for the Billings American Legion Blue Jays for a second year while my friends moved up to the Royals. I started to think that I couldn't compete at the college level.

I have realized that the journey to success is often unpredictable. However, working hard is predictable; it is something every person who wants to reach their goals must do.

My academics required this same mindset. Maintaining a 4.27 GPA while playing two varsity sports was not luck; I approached school the same way I approached baseball. I stopped worrying about being perfect and focused on learning from my mistakes.

It would mean a lot to me to be awarded the Valleydictorian grant. I have developed a better understanding of who I am: a consistent leader, a student striving for mastery, and an athlete who loves the grind. My achievements are a reminder to keep growing, and I will treat this grant the same way. It will allow me to continue spreading 'the joy of the process' to others by working hard, learning, and achieving my educational goals.

Camden McQuillan

High School: Joliet Public Schools

What are your plans after high school?

My plans after high school is going to pursue construction management at the Highlands school at Butte MT. After I receive my degree my plan is to become an electrician. Once I have been an electrician for a bit then I plan to start up my own company.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class in school is English. English is my favorite class because of the teacher and books that we read. I am very into the war and survival type of books. My class only has 8 students in there so we have a lot of 1 on 1 time. Mr. Price is by far my favorite teacher that I have had during school.

Who inspires you and why?

My brother inspires me because I have always wanted to be him if not better than him at everything. Especially in sports, we would always go out side to shoot basketballs or go out in the lawn to throw a football. He always told me his moves and what he likes to do against certain defenders. He was a quite successful man in high school and seeing that made me want to be just like him.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Some things I enjoy out side of school is going to play sport activities with my friends, doing yard work at my grandmas with my family, hanging out with my friends, going to help the people in need.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

If I win the \$5,000 grant, I will use the money to help pay for my college tuition since I am not getting financial aid. Getting the money will help my family out a lot since I have an older brother in college also.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying

that motivates you that you would like to share?

My personal motto is Forte. Forte all started when my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Forte means strength and whenever I struggled with anything by feeling weak or not thinking I'm going to be able to complete something then I always thought in my head Forte. This motto was also used for one of our football motto's since we were a smaller sized teamed compared to the other teams in our division.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

If I were stranded on a desert island, my three things that I bring are a tent or some type of shelter, a gun with plenty of ammo, and filtration device so I can drink clean water whenever. I chose to bring a tent or some type shelter so I can stay warm and be away from all of the bugs and other animals. I chose to bring a gun so I can kill anything for my food supply. I chose to bring a filtration device so I'm never dehydrated and I can drink water whenever I need/want to.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

I would choose hamburgers since that is one of my favorite things to have. I would put lettuce, grilled onions, pickles, fried onion rings, and barbecue sauce.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

I do not see AI impacting my career at all since it's hard to program AI to have common sense like regular humans. Life 5 years from now I will be working as an electrician in Montana thinking about starting my own company.

Any other information you would like to share?

I am a very hard working individual and whenever I start something I always finish it. I like to help the people in need even if it's just taking out their trash or going to mow their lawn. I have realized that sometimes even the smallest things you do for someone can mean the world to people.



“My personal motto is Forte.
Forte means strength.”

Carly Ray

High School: Skyview High School

What are your plans after high school?

Once I graduate high school, I plan on going to The School of Visual Arts in New York to get my BFA in Comics. Then, I want to use my degree to pursue a career in the webcomics industry, working for bigger companies while working on my own projects on the side.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

I enjoy any kind of art classes, whether it be traditional art classes such as painting and advanced art. Or more digital based classes such as animation or digital illustration. I enjoy most art classes, since they let me do the thing I love the most, which is letting my creativity shine through.

Who inspires you and why?

My biggest inspiration is the artist Scott Christian Sava. He's created his own how to draw book, illustrated numerous graphic novels, and worked on his own Netflix original movie. He's also pursued lots of other things such viral YouTube and TikTok content that's reached millions. Most of all, despite all of his success, he remains humble and kind towards his fans and everyone else. Scott's the kind of person I aspire to be, both in career and in character.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

Outside of school, I bowl every Saturday morning, I write books and short stories, and I draw and work on my artwork and creative projects.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

If I win the \$5,000 grant, I will put the money towards paying for things needed for my future education in the arts. I'll mainly use the money to

help pay for class fees and art supplies for college such as needed technology and traditional supplies for foundational classes.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

My personal favorite inspirational saying is from the book series "The Demonata," by Darren Shan, from the book "Slawter," "As long as you're still breathing, then your story's still going."

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

I would bring a water filter straw, matches, and a good multi-tool. All practical items that are useful and can help aid my survival until I get rescued.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

If I had to choose between the two I would probably pick pizza. I think that just a simple, good quality pizza would be much better than a burger. I would also just have pepperoni, since sometimes, simple is better.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

There's been many predictions of where AI could be in five years already. It's already had a massive effect on the art industry. I think that in five years, I'll most likely be competing with AI still, but I also like to be optimistic and think that the AI use in art will die down like NFTs did. Most likely though, AI is still going to impact my daily, non-work related life, due to it already having a large impact now that is likely not going away anytime soon.

Any other information you would like to share?

I'm the youngest at age eighteen of three kids and six grandchildren!



“As long as you’re still breathing,
then your story’s still going.”

from the book series “The Demonata,” by Darren Shan

Ashten Willden

High School: Belfry High School

What are your plans after high school?

I want to pursue a career in Wildlife conservation particularly to be an game warden.

What is your favorite class in school and why?

My favorite class is forging. I like the process of turning something useless into a functional tool or piece of art.

Who inspires you and why?

My uncle inspires me by the way he leads with integrity, balancing a deep devotion to his family with a relentless, fair-minded approach to his business.

What are some things you enjoy outside of school?

I find a unique sense of peace in the quiet patience of fishing and the rewarding challenge of hunting in the great outdoors.

If you win the \$5,000 grant, how will you use the money to help you reach your goals?

I plan to invest this \$5,000 directly into my tuition and essential textbooks to reduce my student debt and focus fully on my studies.

Do you have a personal motto or inspirational saying that motivates you that you would like to share?

"If you believe you can you're already half there" Franklin Roosevelt.

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only bring three things, what three things would you bring and why?

If I were stranded on an island, I would bring a boat, plenty of gasoline, and a satellite phone to ensure I have both a reliable way to navigate the open water and a direct line to call for help.

If you had to choose between hamburgers or pizza, which would you choose and what would be on it?

If I had to choose, I would pick hamburgers over pizza for the rest of my life because of their endless customization options from the choice of protein to the infinite variety of toppings and buns ensuring I would never get bored.

How do you see AI impacting your career and life 5 years from now?

In five years, game wardens will likely use AI to better track wildlife and catch poachers using smart cameras and data.

Any other information you would like to share?

I love how fishing connects me to the outdoors, which is why I'm so passionate about wildlife conservation and protecting our natural waters.

"If you believe you can you're already half there."

Franklin Roosevelt



CONGRATS SENIORS



VALLEY CREDIT UNION IS THRILLED TO CELEBRATE OUR 12 FEATURED VALLEYDICTIONIAN STUDENTS AND \$5,000 GRANT RECIPIENT AS THEY START THEIR NEXT CHAPTER OF LIFE.

Valley Credit Union congratulates our featured seniors on all their achievements and successes that have brought them to where they are today. With lots of drive and motivation, these students show so much potential in their respective career paths following graduation. Graduates, thank you for sharing your many ambitions with us and for letting us showcase your inspiring futures throughout the year. We look forward to seeing all of the great things you will accomplish. Congratulations Class of 2026!

NOMINATED SENIORS

Kyra Buller
Haylie Clark
Jennifer Coblentz
Jace Dostal
Micah Falls Down
Dillon Gehnert
Craig Green
Logan Herden
Timmy Lien
Canden McQuillan
Carly Ray
Ashten Willden

\$5,000 GRANT RECIPIENT
Jennifer Coblentz



valleyfcu.com



FEDERALLY INSURED BY NCUA