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Left and forgotten? Not these kids





Sally Kelly, board member of Pine Haven Center for Boys in Allenstown, waves to the boys on Friday. Kelly thought of the parade saying, "they haven't been allowed visitors in months."

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By [RAY DUCKLER \(/byline?byline=By_RAY_DUCKLER\)](#)
Monitor columnist

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The blaring of an air horn set the plan in motion Friday at 2:01 p.m.

Then came the toot-toot of a car's horn. Then more car horns, the whirring of sirens from Allenstown Fire and Police Department vehicles, shouting, balloons, until, at 2:04 p.m., a student at Pine Haven Center for Boys in Allenstown said, above the din, "Hey, is that a parade?"

Yes. A long line of vehicles, 85 in all, created an organic surprise party, needed when the students at the school for wayward boys learned that the normal awards night, to close out the school year, would be canceled. Not enough social distancing in the gym.



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That left the 22 students, ages 6 to 14, without an honored tradition, until all those sounds and cheers emerged at the crest of the long driveway that takes you from River Street to the school's entrance.

The boys at Pine Haven come from the Granite State and Vermont. They've suffered some kind of abuse, and they live at Pine Haven year-round, taking classes and fighting to mend emotional wounds.

This was their send-off for summer, following the completion of their course work. Two finished eighth grade to graduate.

"These boys have had troubled lives," Sally Kelly, a former state representative from Chichester, said. "And they haven't been allowed visitors in months. They have not seen a caseworker in months, or a respite family, and they have not left the property."

Friday's parade was Kelly's baby. She's a board member at Pine Haven, and she wanted to do something more than merely hand out awards in the gym, this time with hardly anyone there to cheer.

Then, while working at her home office in Chichester, she heard sirens, from a police car and a fire engine. She heard honking. She saw a parade go by to celebrate a school's graduation.

"I jumped in my car and followed and started honking my horn," Kelly told me. "And then I see little kids at the end of the driveway and all I see are smiles from ear to ear. I saw the photos and my friend was in it with her child."

She made a U-turn and went home.

"I began thinking about those poor boys," Kelly said. "I said we can get people and do this."

Enter Father Paul Riva, the guiding light for children at Pine Haven for 25 years. It's his home now, and he's responsible for the growth of the boys.

"Every day is a new day, and you'll never know what they're going to do," Father

Paul said. "They're usually good, but they get upset sometimes. They cannot go to public schools, so we have to give them the skills to become good citizens."

His Italian accent was obvious. He's one of the Somascan Fathers, an order of Catholic priests based in Somascan, Italy. The order was founded in the 16th century, and the Fathers were identified as Fathers of the Orphans.

He studied in Rome and dedicated his life to the welfare of children. In a strange twist, his Order had ties with Saint Anselm College, and that led to his assignment at Pine Haven at age 27.

"I love New Hampshire," Father Paul said. "It reminds me of the Italian mountains, and the trees are green like they are high up in the (Italian) mountains."

Of course, staging an event because some weird illness had changed interactions among people was new to everyone. Lots of patterns and procedures and activities have been shelved because of the coronavirus.

Shortly before the long line of cars on the River Street shoulder entered, Carol Frekey-Harkness said her daughter, Sarah Harkness, had been hired as a teacher at the school after serving two months as a substitute.

"She's see the special part in each of the boys," Carol said. "And the boys are really smart."

Joe Bonocchi taught one of the two graduating students before retiring last year.

"I'm happy for him," Bonocchi said. "He's moving on to continue with new adventures in life."

Not before this shocker, though. The students left the gym after their tiny ceremony, hardly anyone there.

About 50 people gathered on a grassy edge, under a shady tree, near the black tar of the driveway. Students, friends relatives.

When it was over, when the serpentine line of cars had moved around the circular driveway and back to River Street, Kelly paused to take it all in, then spoke with recent events on her mind.

"Happy summer," she shouted to the kids. "And don't get too close to me."


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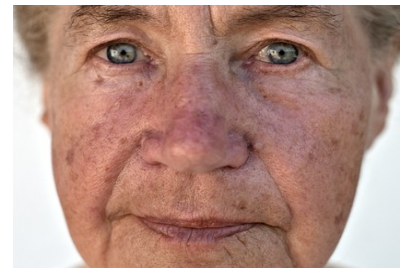
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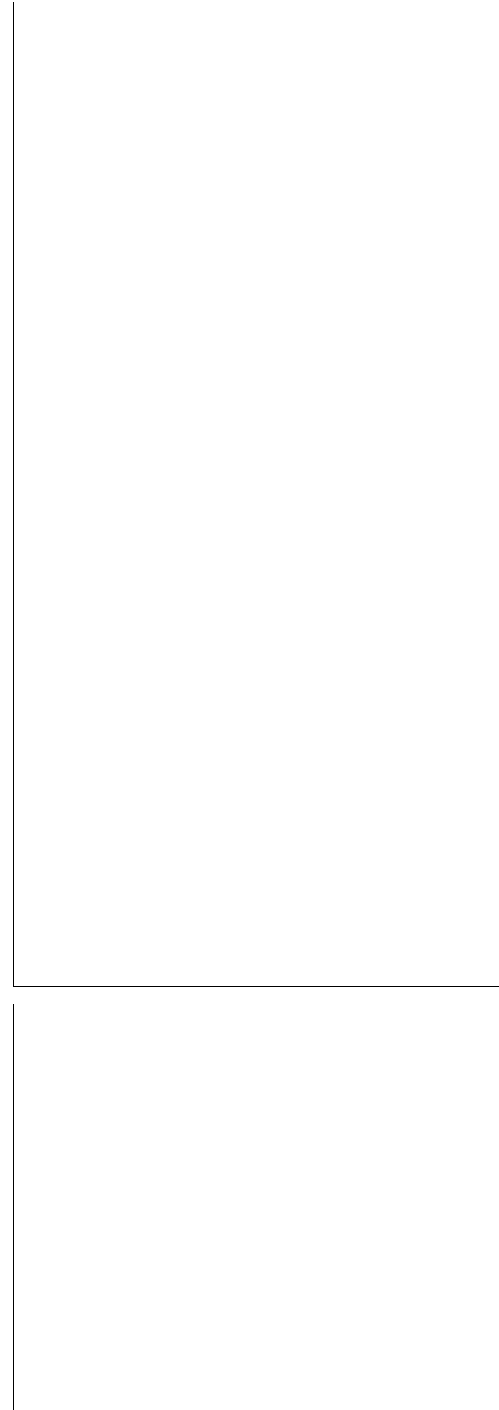
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