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Meet Zephyrhills Valedictorian and Salutatorian Alexander Gard and Samantha Bailey



Alexander Gard

Samantha



ZHS saw a feverish run to the top of the class with Gard and Bailey finishing the race in the top two spots

> By Andy Warrener News Reporter

Becoming valedictorian is no small feat. It Any stumble, any flinch and you are knocked Zephyrhills but Gard took it in stride. off the top. Valedictorian Alexander Gard managed to not slip up, not even once during his en-started to think about mechanical engineering, tire high school career.

'It was very competitive for the entire four years," Gard said. "I could not mess up once. If I did something my senior year, I would fall in down to anything too specific. His interests out-

niors all in a tight race to the finish line. Gard broke the tape at the line with an unweighted 4.0 GPA. Yes, that means not a "B" not anywhere trades field where you work on many different in his entire high school career. Bailey got one projects like solar, wind turbines," Gard said. "I "B" and her unweighted GPA stood at 3.9672, three-hundredths of a percent off.

try seemed bent on knocking him off the top. He and over.' took Chemistry Honors in his sophomore year, Gard got an "A" but it was a struggle. AP Chemistry of solutions. He is also someone not easily dishis senior year was also a challenge. He got the suaded. "A" but did not pass the AP exam and so had to take it again, this time dual enrolled at PHSC.

"I was sweating before every test," Gard

cating those ideas to an audience where Gard freshman to sophomore years.

really found his wheelhouse. Participating in Odyssey of the Mind and on his robotics team at Woodland Elementary School, Gard found himself the advocate for the team, the person most able to explain to the public, judges in this case, just what was happening and the work that went into the projects.

"I really liked the leadership part of it," Gard said. "I was very comfortable performing or presenting in front of judges.

Gard attended Centennial Middle School, pursuing the STEM curriculum and attended ZHS over other schools due to its aeronaurequires a superhuman level of concentration. tics program. The program eventually closed at

> 'When the (aeronautics) program crashed, I Gard said. "There are so many different types of jobs in that field.

Gard chose his path in order not to be tied stretch mechanical engineering and reach into According to Gard, there were five ZHS seurban development, coding, even social and environmental activism.

'Mechanical Engineering is a jack-of-alllike the idea of not being tied to specific jobs but being able to address the needs of a community. It nearly didn't happen for Gard. Chemis- I think I would be bored with the same job over

Gard is certainly someone who is in pursuit

"I'm not an extrovert but I'm able to talk to people and explain things," Gard said.

He participated in sessions called TedX, an offshoot version of Ted Talks that occur primar-While chemistry was a constant source of ily in schools. Gard participated in these talks stress, public speaking and communicating during his eighth and 11th grade years. Gard difficult ideas came naturally to Gard. He will isn't one to take band news laying down, either. be pursuing two bachelor's degrees at Florida Not just the aeronautics program imploding, Polytechnic University (mechanical and envi- other social outlets closed off for Gard during ronmental engineering) but it was communi- the COVID-19 years which took place over his

Bobbi Madonna

jazz band my freshman year," Gard said. "I lost ogy with an eventual master's degree in geneta lot of extra curriculars.'

them into sign language.

mental conscience...watch out for this one.

Racing Gard to the GPA finish line was Samantha Bailey. Bailey had two big goals in high ence with this in the last three years. It's led her school, one was to be at the top of her graduating toward this field. Bailey suffers from vestibular class, one was to have her Associate Arts (AA) migraines. Now this is not a genetic disorder but degree complete. She was three-hundredths of a it is a rare condition that is often mis-diagnosed percent off her first goal and she pulled off her or not diagnosed at all. It took nearly two years second goal in flying colors. In fact, both Bailey of appointments and tests to finally diagnose and Gard received medals for straight "A"s in Bailey their dual enrollment classes at PHSC. Bailey already has her AA diploma in hand.

The COVID-19 years threw her in a different trajectory also. Being able to work at her own pace through online modules, she man- balance issues, pain, sight and smell sensitivity, aged to push through the entire year's curriculum long before the end of the term. This led her to go and take more dual enrollment classes at PHSC. At first, the dual enrollment classes were get diagnosed accurately or timely. online but later she began to take them at the college campus.

she didn't even take a single class at ZHS for there into the world. her junior and senior years. By knocking out the

"Drama Club folded, the Gay-Straight Alliassociates degree, the field is now wide open for ance Club folded, we had no performances for Bailey to pursue a bachelor's degree in cell biolic counseling. Just what is genetic counseling? Gard found an outlet in art and coding. Af- Well, taking cues from Bailey herself, it's treatter taking AP Art and four or five other art class- ment strategies for people with genetic disores, Gard grew to specialize in drawing hands, ders that affect them. Cell biology is the back-which as any artist knows, is one of the more ground to help identify genetic maladies and difficult parts of the human figure to draw. Gard genetic counseling is the treatment thereof. For took a hand motif and put it into his senior art instance, the gene DDX3X can have mutations project, a ceiling tile. Gard also designed a cod- that cause learning and/or developmental ising program that took typed words and turned sues for patients. Oftentimes, there are not cures n into sign language. for these things but there are treatment options, A problem solver with an ability to commucoping strategies and plans that can help mitinicate ideas, together with a social and environ- gate the symptoms. This is where genetic counseling comes in.

Bailey had an up close and personal experi-

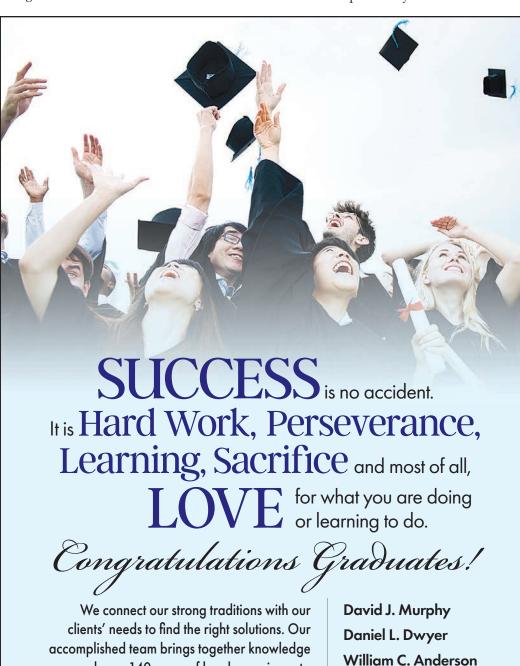
People talk to you and they think you don't have anything wrong with you," Bailey said. "You feel like you're getting gaslit."

Symptoms of vestibular migraines include: dizziness and nausea. Bailey's heart goes out to people, especially small children who have maladies but can't advocate for themselves or don't

"I want to advocate for those kids so they don't have to go through that," Bailey said.

"I think a lot in high school, students are trying just to skate by and teachers are spending a lot of class time trying to discipline the stuments. Her mom Melissa is a biology major dents," Bailey said. "In college, students want from USF and has pet ball pythons. Bailey has the education and they dig deeper into the ma- her own exotic pets in five tarantulas and four

Bailey became so enamoured by this that Sephyrhills has got to be proud of their top she moved to full time at PHSC, so much so that two students and what they are sending out



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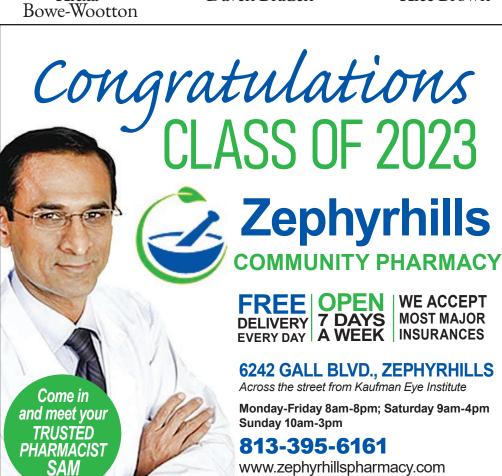
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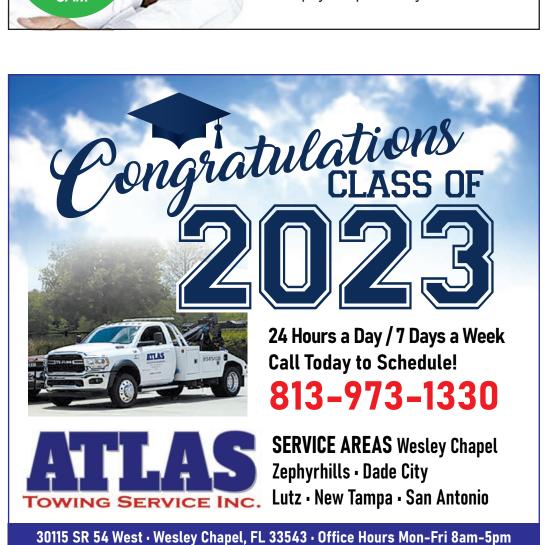


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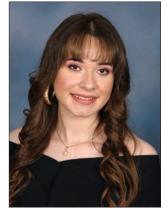
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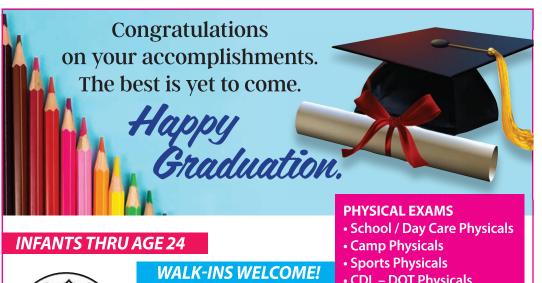
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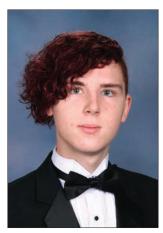
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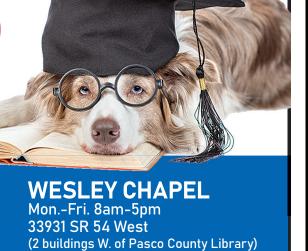
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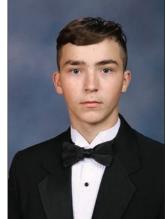
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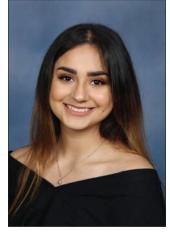
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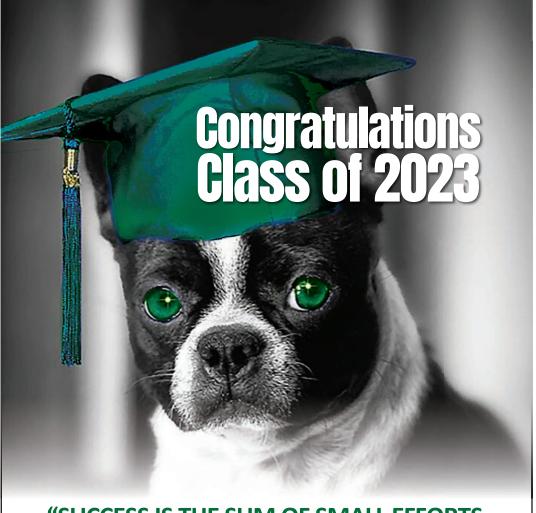
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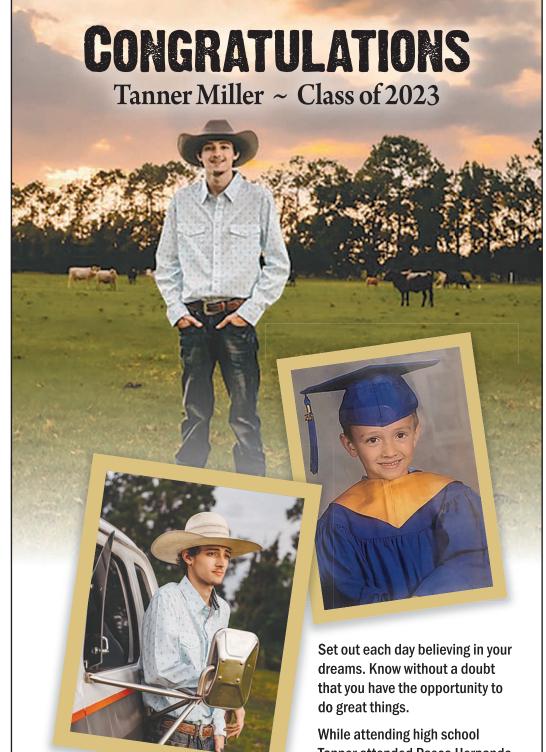
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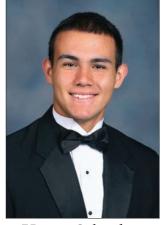
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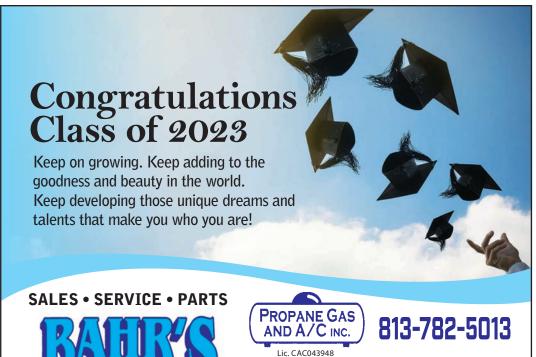
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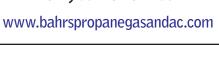


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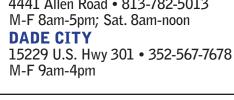




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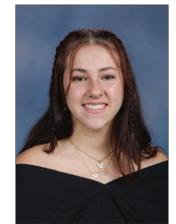
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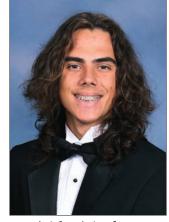
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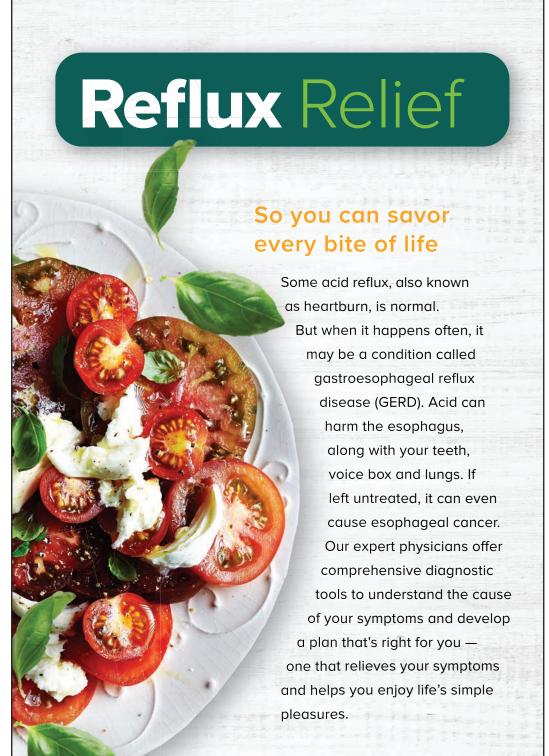


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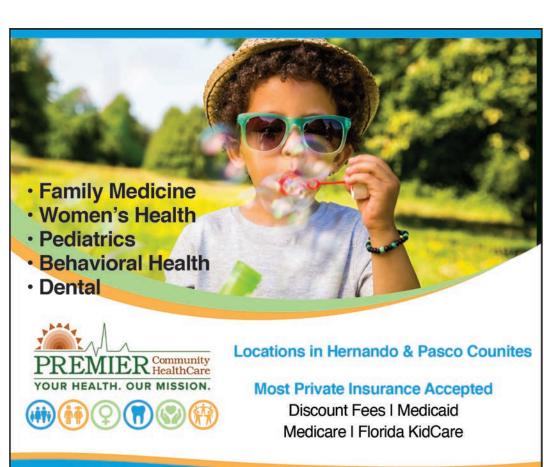
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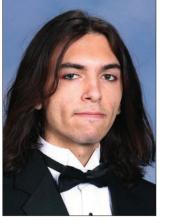
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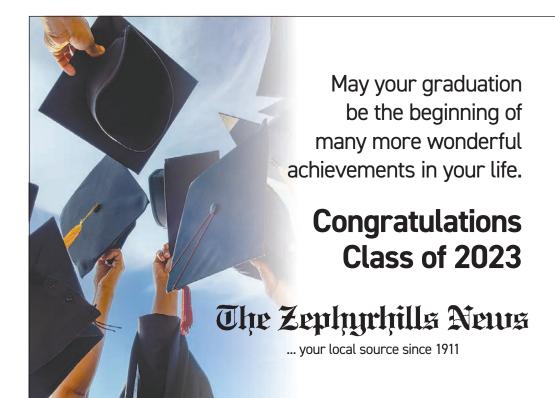
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Group Schedule:

One-Time Virtual Group Quit Sessions

Thursday, June 1, 2023 | 6:00pm - 8:00pm Friday, June 2, 2023 | 12:00pm - 2:00pm Monday, June 5, 2023 | 5:30pm - 7:30pm SPANISH

Monday, June 5, 2023 | 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Wednesday, June 7, 2023 | 10:00am - 12:00pm

Thursday, June 8, 2023 | 1:00pm - 3:00pm

Monday, June 12, 2023 | 10:00am - 12:00pm

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 | 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Thursday, June 15, 2023 | 5:30pm - 7:30pm

4-Week Virtual Group

Tuesdays, June 6 - June 27, 2023 2:00pm - 3:00pm

One-Time In-Person Group Quit Sessions

Atonement Lutheran Church 29617 SR 54, Wesley Chapel Tuesday, June 13, 2023 10:30am - 12:30pm

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