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AAE graduates have their night to shine

**BY BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA
STAFF WRITER**

APPLE VALLEY

• The auditorium at High Desert Church in Victorville began to fill by 6 p.m. Friday as eager parents and family members walked in holding flowers, balloons and signs of encouragement.

As the familiar “Pomp and Circumstance” began to play, necks craned and cameras flashed trying to get that glimpse of the nervous and excited graduate.

Many of the Academy for Academic Excellence graduates have found inspiration to keep going for four years in many places. One student found the drive to continue and to succeed following a tragic family accident.

Three years ago, while Ryan Charters, his brother Austin, then 12, and their grandfather were hunting near Porterville, Austin was accidentally shot in the neck, leaving the boy paralyzed.

For the entire Charters family, the next few months were a challenge. “I missed about a couple weeks straight because I was going up to see him in San Jose,” Ryan said. Austin had been flown to a Fresno hospital to be stabilized then taken to San Jose for treatment. “Then I went to school only three days a week so I could stay close to him.”

The two brothers became a support system for each other. Ryan would help his mother and father with Austin’s care, helping to lift his brother in and out of bed and assisting with other chores. Austin also became an inspiration for Ryan.

Despite the setbacks, Austin — who is getting ready to enter the 10th grade at AAE, has just finished one of his college courses.

“We are inspirations for each other,” Ryan said, and admitted that when he began his freshman year, he struggled with academics. Seeing his brother struggle and succeed along with solidifying his own dreams of becoming a California Highway Patrol officer, helped Ryan focus on his goals of graduation.

As Ryan walked with the rest of the 95 students graduating, he was not only proud of his accomplishments, but also to know his brother and parents were in the crowd cheering him on.

“To anybody going through any kind of problem, keep your head up and stay positive,” Ryan said. “Nothing is impossible. That is what my brother has taught me and it has been both of us helping and teaching each other.”

That sentiment was echoed by one of the four class of 2009 valedictorians, Arturo

Garcia Jr., when he encouraged his fellow graduates to never give up and to always want more out of life. Garcia will be attending Yale.

Along with the cheers there were some tears as Bodhisattava Sherzer-Potter was honored on what would have been her graduation night. Sherzer-Potter and her boyfriend Christopher Cody Thompson were killed in 2008 in an abandoned bunker in Helendale.

Faculty reminded the graduates that the rest of their lives lay before them and it was their turn to shine.



JAMES QUIGG, DAILY PRESS

CHEERS FOR PEERS: Academy of Academic Excellence graduates cheer after one of their valedictorian speeches Friday night during their commencement ceremony. The school honored four valedictorians.

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