Aiming for the stars

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APTOS — In the minutes before she lined up with her 296 fellow graduates to march into the Carl Connelly stadium at Cabrillo College June 4, Apts High School valedictorian Francisca Perez said she would encourage incoming freshmen to remember that they all have the makings of greatness.

“The biggest thing is to believe in your potential,” she said. “As long as you keep that drive and determination, you can really accomplish anything.”

Perez plans to attend Cornell University, where she will major in mechanical engineering and minor in aerospace engineering. She hopes one day to become an astronaut.

“I’m really excited,” she said. “I’m looking forward to the future and all the amazing experiences I’m going to have.”

Beaujo Gelm grew up working on engines with his father. That instilled in him a love for machines that inspired him to study diesel mechanics at Hartnell College.

“I miss Apts High School, I really do,” he said. “I can’t believe it went by so quick.”

He said he wished he had taken the time to savor his experience.

“I was so ready to leave, and that was a mistake,” he said. “I wish I would have taken the time to enjoy it.”

Before he started at Apts High, Wyatt Stoker said he heard three things you never forget your first day, it goes fast and you don’t want it to end.

“I was the complete opposite,” he said. “I have no recollection of my first day, and it seemed like an eternity to me.”

Still, he said it is important for students to enjoy their time while in high school even as they focus on their studies.

“Work hard and play hard,” he said. “It’s important to do well, but also don’t let the experience slip away from you.”

Stoker said he plans to attend UC Santa Barbara in the fall with an undeclared major.

Atleti Morales said she plans to move to South Africa for at least six months to do field work as part of a one-year mission through her church. Following that she will then attend Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego to study psychology.

When she came to Apts High as a junior, Morales said she received guidance from counselor Sylvia Sanchez.

“She really helped me with people living without homes and their problems just keep getting worse because of that,” Morales said. “I would love to work with these folks to help improve their living conditions.”

When asked what she would like to say for this article, Morales said, “Sometimes it’s the people that no one imagines anything of who do the things no one can imagine.”