

Hancock Region



Bar Harbor tour boat operator Eddie Monat strikes a starfish pose recently on his boat Seal. Monat has been picked to give the commencement speech this weekend at Mount Desert Island High School. Photo courtesy of Richard Sassaman

Unconventional speaker chosen for graduation

By Bill Trotter

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BAR HARBOR — Stephen King was their only other candidate.

So when the world-renowned author and Bangor resident declined their offer, members of the graduating class at Mount Desert Island High School knew who their choice would be.

They wanted Eddie Monat of Surry to be the commencement speaker at their graduation.

Monat (pronounced "mo-NAY") is the former local harbor master and current owner and operator of Diver Ed's Dive-In Theater, a seasonal sightseeing business that takes tourists out on the vessel Seal to see what kind of life exists below the surface of Frenchman Bay.

Monat, 40, dives with a camera and microphone rigged up to his waterproof helmet so he can regale his passengers with goofy tales about what he finds on the bottom as they watch the action on a large video screen on the boat.

When he comes back to the boat he brings creatures of the briny deep with him, often encouraging passengers to kiss ugly fish he finds and placing starfish on the heads of children whose toothy grins could be measured in, well, nautical miles.

And aside from his former municipal job and current business, Monat is fairly well-known around Bar Harbor. He used to host a heavy-metal radio show on now-defunct local radio station WMDI, playing releases the other DJs didn't want to play.

"I got the dregs," he said Tuesday afternoon. "It was perfect for me."

And he's not shy about clowning around to get a laugh, either on or off duty. During the local working waterfront celebration this past Sunday, Monat was one of the more vigorous contestants in a blindfolded-rowing contest, merrily churning the oars in the harbor while a giggling teammate in the dinghy directed him toward a beach near the downtown pier.

So what does any of this have to do with celebrating academic achievement? Why pick such an unconventional personality to be the main speaker at such a formal event?

Storr Erickson, senior class president, said Wednesday morning that he and his classmates didn't want to get someone who would give them a canned, frequently delivered speech.

"I hope it's personal and funny," Erickson said in the high school gymnasium, just after he and his classmates had rehearsed for the ceremony. "I thought it was important to get a personal speech."

Susan Falt, the senior class treasurer, said she hopes Monat's speech will be "something to remember. Something that will stand out from the rest of the graduation."

Bo Greene, faculty adviser for the senior class, said Monat's life is an inspiration for anyone. He supported his family when he was in high school, she said, and has found success while being true to himself.

"He's an unbelievable teacher," said Greene, who has known Monat for years. "It's breathtaking to watch him work with people of all ages. And he's wicked funny."

She said when Monat asked her what he should wear to give the speech, she told him to dress however he wanted. He just has to remember there will be grandparents in the audience, she said.

"He's had incredible experiences and he's living his dream," she said. "He's not a coat-and-tie guy."

A graduate of College of the Atlantic, Monat said he never imagined he would be picked to speak at the high school's commencement.

"I was pretty excited," he said about being asked. "That night I didn't sleep."

Monat said his name must have come up because he knows students at the high school. Some he has given scuba-diving lessons to and others he knows from his harbor master days. Still others he knows because he used to be their baby sitter, he said.

Monat said he plans on giving an atypical graduation talk but declined to reveal ahead of time what the topic of his address will be. He said it won't resemble the talks he gives on his boat.

"I'm going to keep it a surprise," he said. "Maybe [I'll bring] a prop or two, but I don't think I'll bring any sea creatures. I'm going to try to not make it too boring."

The ceremony is scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 10, at the high school.