

## **Principal Carmela Leonardi's Huntington High School Graduation Speech - 2009**

It is an honor for me to welcome students, parents, family members and members of the school board here tonight. Before I present my remarks I would like to take this opportunity to thank the two assistant principals, Mr. Noce and Mr. Stein and all department administrators for their work with students and their families. A special thank you goes to the teachers who are committed to the success of every student and continue to take a personal interest in their academic and social development.

It has become my practice, in preparing for this important event, to reflect on the qualities and gifts members of the senior class have displayed in their four years at Huntington High School. I would like to share with you just some of their achievements and I apologize in advance for only mentioning a few. Members of the class of 2009 are service minded. In fact, many have raised their own money to fund mission trips to New Orleans, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. One of our students trains seeing-eye dogs. A number of our seniors achieved the very prestigious honors of Eagle Scout and the Gold Award which, as you know, require the implementation of involved projects that benefit their community. The class of 2009 has many gifted athletes who were recruited to participate on Division 1 athletic teams. One of our talented graphic artists created a mural commissioned by the McQuilling Co. in Garden City. Another of our seniors is such a gifted craftsman that he was able to build his own boat. He might be called upon to build us an ark in the very near future.

In these hard economic times, Huntington High School seniors nervously anticipated their financial aid packages, many waiting to view all

of their college award letters before making their freshman deposits. This shift in cost conscious decision making is reflective of the country's economic crisis to which Huntington's seniors are responding responsibly. They are critically evaluating their educational and career goals, applying to a variety of private and public institutions and completing more scholarship applications than in years past.

And now some hard data about all that they accomplished. Many of our seniors challenged themselves with Advanced Placement courses that have the potential of earning them college level credits. 112 seniors as opposed to last year's 81 took AP exams. 67 compared to last year's 40 took three AP exams or more with six students (double last year's number) taking six AP exams each for a collective total of 331 AP tests as compared to the previous total of 210.

For this senior class, the college center processed 1,439 college applications. As of today the class of 2009 received \$13,428,936 in scholarship money. This amount exceeds last year's by \$4,887,392. 90% of the students sitting here today will be going to college. 2.1% enlisted in the military, 2% will be working to complete a certification program and 4.1% are beginning their work careers. One student will be attending an academic leadership program in Israel.

The college bound students will be attending Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, all SUNY and various out of state public and private colleges and universities including UCLA, University of Virginia, University of NC at Chapel Hill, Rutgers, College of William and Mary, Boston College, Duke, University of Notre Dame, Georgetown, NYU, Tufts and Fordham to name a few.

Some of the interesting majors they have selected include: Film and Televisions Studies, Theater Design/ Stage Crew, Aviation, Mathematics, Engineering, Education, Astronomy, Biology, Pharmacy, Nursing, Accounting, Photography, Architecture, Fashion Design, Music, Business Management, Journalism, Political Science, Sports Event Management, Pre-medical. These college placements and career choices more than anything else speak to the commitment our young adults are making for their own and our future.

As a closing thought I went back to my now well known “Book of Answers” by Carol Bolt. This little book has not let me down yet. When I opened a page at random, it offered the following recommendation: “Follow through on your obligations.” More than any other group, the class of 2009 has been warned that the future of our country and our planet rests on their skills and talents. We, as parents, would not have chosen to put such a burden on their young shoulders. Judging from the achievements I have just listed, however, we can be encouraged by the knowledge that our sons and daughters will take up the responsibilities they have been handed and find solutions where we did not dream or even dared to hope for. For my part I strongly believe that the future of our society is in very capable hands.

Congratulations to each member of the graduating class and their families, may you continue to experience great success in your future endeavors and remember that “like faith, a great education is empty if it does not affect the way we live our lives.”