Class of 2004 Graduates

Threatening skies might have forced Huntington High School’s 143rd commencement exercises indoors but they did nothing to dampen the festive mood of the nearly 200 Class of 2004 members who received their coveted diplomas. As the seniors marched into the auditorium wearing traditional white and blue robes, they received a standing ovation from a crowd of about 1,700.

The 85-minute ceremony continued a Huntington tradition that dates to 1862 when the first graduating class of six students was presented with diplomas. Among several short speeches were addresses by valedictorian Chelsea Kocis and salutatorian Sarah McGullam.

Students sported wide smiles, happy to have reached their goals and excited about the future. Many parents snapped photos while others filmed the proceedings. A full orchestra of underclassmen sat on the stage and played Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance No. 1,” among other tunes.

“After high school, some of you will go on to college, some of you may take time off, and others may travel or start a career,” said Ms. Kocis, who will attend the University of Pennsylvania in the fall. “But wherever you go, go with everything you have. Remember that it is not the destination, but the journey that is important because the future is uncertain. No one knows what the next change is going to be, or what unexpected opportunity is waiting a few months or a few years down the road to change our entire lives. We live in a world that is continuously changing, but if one thing is certain, it is the past four years, the experiences we’ve had, the lessons learned and above all the amazing friendships we’ve made.”

“There is no acceptable reason for any of us to ‘settle down’ into the life that’s expected of us,” said Ms. McGullam, who will attend Middlebury College. “The next couple of years will certainly be a welcome change for most of us, but let’s not allow ourselves to get caught up in the notion that we must drop all of our dreams to enter the real world.”

The Class of 2004 is an impressive group of young men and women who filed more than 2,000 college applications and earned over $6 million in scholarships. “Once again we are sending our students to many of the top colleges and universities in America,” Karen Schlendorf, Huntington’s college counselor said.

“Graduation day is a day for stars in your eyes and dreams in your heart,” Superintendent John J. Finello told the graduates. “I hope that you will work hard to make those dreams come true. Nobody else can do that for you. There is nothing sweeter than success due to hard work. I sincerely hope that you will continue to further your education throughout your life. It is the light of learning that will assist in illuminating the roads ahead. Its beams will brightly shine many paths of choice and assist you to understand where those paths will lead.”

Good Luck Graduates
Chelsea Kocis is passionate about almost everything she does. With a work ethic second to none, it didn’t surprise anyone when she was announced as the valedictorian of Huntington’s Class of 2004. Yet, despite having months to work on her graduation address, it only came into clear focus after a chance conversation.

“I was really unsure of what I wanted to say today until somebody asked what I was so nervous about,” Ms. Kocis told the crowd at the Commencement Exercises. “She said, ‘Chelsea, this is a chance of a lifetime, this is your opportunity to speak to your classmates one final time before you graduate.’ And then it dawned on me that she was right, except that today is not just an opportunity for me.”

An extremely well rounded young woman, Ms. Kocis has received academic awards in chemistry, biology, math, Spanish and social studies. She is a recipient of the St. John’s University Women in Science Award, is a member of the National Honor Society and the Spanish and Math honor societies and was named a New York State Scholar Athlete.

“Today marks the beginning of many new opportunities for each one of us,” Ms. Kocis told her fellow graduates during her valedictory address. “According to the popular saying, the future is ours, but it is up to us to decide what we are going to do with it. Don’t just go through the motions. It’s our chance to take risks and experience something new.”

Both humble and modest, Ms. Kocis is beloved by her peers. She earned the prestigious Robert K. Toaz Memorial Prize, given in honor of the early 20th Century Huntington administrator, and the T. Christopher Pettit Memorial Scholarship as well as being named the Booster Club’s Female Scholar Athlete of the Year.

At the Senior Athletic Awards Banquet, Ms. Kocis won the field hockey team’s Most Valuable Player Award and was the lacrosse team’s Most Improved Player. Her club memberships have included Make a Wish, DECA, Natural Helpers and the Key club, as well as serving as the secretary of the student government.

As busy as she is with her studies and sports, Ms. Kocis still works part-time and serves as a Eucharistic minister at St. Patrick’s Church.

Mixed among the Class of 2004 where nearly three-dozen students who earned the prestigious designation of Regents Diploma with Honors for their exceptional performance on a battery of state exams.

The honorees include Kevin Beck (Roanoke College), Christina Bezus (New York University), Kathryn Boshko (Babson College), Jessica Brown (Boston College), Amy Burlage (University of Richmond), Jacqueline Callahan (SUNY Geneseo), Jeffrey Clowes (University of Richmond), Lisa Del Gaudio (C.W. Post), Maegan DelGuidice (Adelphi University), Nicole DiBiase (SUNY New Paltz), Erin Doyle (Bucknell University), Laura Ellman (Lafayette College), Joanna Follman (University of Delaware), Joseph Greenstein (SUNY Binghamton), Jennifer Howell (Gettysburg College), Jessica Ironman (Northeastern University), Chelsea Kocis (University of Pennsylvania), Michael Krumholz (SUNY Binghamton), Caitlin Latini (Lehigh University), Kiera McCourt (University of Scranton), Jennifer McGullam (Dartmouth College), Sarah McGullam (Middlebury College), Jamie Morrissey (Manhattan College), Megan O’Leary (Tulane University), Johanna Pape (Cornell University), James Provenzano (Hampden-Sydney College), Katherine Russo (Fordham University), Sarah Sher (Jewish Theological Seminary of America at Columbia University), Brandon Smoller (University of Rochester), Matthew Sobin (Tufts University), Regina Wasarhaley (SUNY Albany) and Blake Wind (SUNY Stony Brook).
Sarah McGullam’s Salutatory Addresses Challenges Class of 2004

Sarah McGullam’s salutatory address reached back into her childhood as she shared with her Huntington High School classmates and their family members a story about how one person can make a difference in the world. It was a tale that both sought to challenge and inspire the Class of 2004.

“I remember, many years ago, my family went to a folk festival and I heard this old man strumming away on his banjo,” Middlebury College bound Ms. McGullam said. “He was singing about the environment, and garbage, and peace, and cleaning up the Hudson River – it’s something he’d been singing about for decades. But it was what I saw that most impressed me. On the front of his banjo, the following was written: ‘This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender.’ He’s had that on the drum of his banjo for almost 50 years.

“That old man was Pete Seeger. “When I went to that same festival last weekend, the inscription was still on the banjo as he was playing,” Ms. McGullam continued. “He was stooped and his voice had a quaver to it – he’s 85, after all – but there was still fire and conviction in the songs he sang. This 85 year old man’s passion still inspires people, just as it inspired ordinary workers for whom he sang in the ‘40’s.”

Ms. McGullam’s point in telling the story was to encourage her classmates to believe that they could go out and make a difference in the world – individually and collectively. At Huntington she not only earned high marks in the toughest classes but also was the principal cello player in the orchestra, a member of four honor societies, a National Merit Commended Student and active with many clubs and the Gemini Youth Orchestra.

She earned a top ten finish in Suffolk on the National French Exam and garnered the St. John’s Women in Science Award and works a steady job at the Huntington Public Library. “Yet, despite it all, she has always managed to get everything done without relaxing her standards of excellence,” classmate Johanna Pape said. “How she does that exactly will forever be a mystery to me, though I suspect it has something to do with her dedication to everything she is involved in, from school to music to her job.”

Huntington High School 2004 Graduation Briefs

Senior class president Megan O’Leary, who is headed to Tulane University, said Huntington would forever be in her heart. “True we may all leave here today with different agendas and plans, but this isn’t the ending, this isn’t goodbye,” she said. “This is only the beginning. From here on out we embark on new adventures, and new triumphs. We will make new friends and create new memories. However, we will not say goodbye to all of the memorable times, priceless experiences or the wonderful people we encountered here in high school. They will stay with us, wherever we may go.”

Class of 2004 member Jana Piccola, who will attend Quinnipiac University, introduced her neighbor, School Board President Robert T. Lee who told the crowd a funny story at the start of his remarks. “I am told that Nels Smith, a former governor of Wyoming, has the record for having given one of the shortest commencement speeches ever,” he said. “When it was his time to speak, he went up to the podium, looked out at all the graduates, and said, ‘You done good.’ Then he went back and sat down. While my speech will not be as short at Governor Smith, I hope to give him a run for his money.” While his address was brief, he did make a point. “While it might sound trite, hackneyed or a bit overdone, I would also like to congratulate and honor your parents, grandparents, family members and friends – who have supported you all of these years,” he said. “Their support and sacrifice have helped you to reach this significant moment in your young lives. Where would any of us be without them?”
Superintendent John J. Finello, himself a graduate of Huntington High School (’68), used his address to challenge the Class of 2004 to maintain high personal standards and to keep their individual egos in check.

“We live in a world where there is hatred, cruelty and ignorance,” Mr. Finello said. “Do not allow yourself to fall victim to selfishness, greed or inhumanity. Rather, be understanding, tolerant, caring and concerned. Kind and thoughtful acts promote understanding, cooperation, consideration and communication among people. Think of how good you feel when a friend is kind to you. Perhaps, you cannot change the whole world but you can make a difference to those you come to know. I hope that in the years to come you will be known for your integrity, your honesty and your humanity.

“It does not matter what you choose to do in the future if you remember to help others along the way. It does not matter whether you are a professor or a gardener as long as you remember that every type of work has its own value and dignity. It does not matter how high you rise in the world’s estimation as long as you do not get above yourself. It is what you do with the time allocated to you that matters most.”

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Maria Bisono is headed to New York University this fall, but at the graduation she stood before the commencement crowd and introduced Huntington Principal Carmela Leonardi. “Over the past two years I have gotten to know Dr. Leonardi,” she said. “From what I’ve seen she is one of the most hard working and dedicated women I know. She will always find time in her busy schedule to talk to you. Whatever the problem is she will try her best to please everyone.”

An Honor: School trustee Jill Collyer presented Aimee A. LeMay with her diploma. When Ms. LaMay was three years old Mrs. Collyer was her nursery school teacher in the Huntington YMCA program. It was a joy for the pair to be reunited on the high school stage at the commencement. Ms. LaMay is headed to the Berklee College of Music.

All Smiles: Friends and neighbors Pierre Delva (left) and Kevin Beck enjoyed the pleasure of receiving their diplomas together. Mr. Delva is headed to C.W. Post where he will also play on the varsity football team. Mr. Beck will attend Roanoke College in the fall.

National Merit Commended
Erin Doyle
Jennifer McGullam
Sarah McGullam
Brandon Smoller

2004 Advanced Placement Scholars
Brandon Smoller
Matthew Sobin

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Huntington Principal Carmela Leonardi gave some heartfelt advice to the Class of 2004. “My suggestion to each of you is to create the highest, grandest vision possible for your life because you will become what you believe,” she said. “In the years to come you will shape the values of our society, you will influence our economy and you will drive our culture. My sincere wish for each of you is that your achievements reflect the love that is in your heart and your commitment to improve the future.

“I urge you, no matter what the distance, to hold on tight to your parents, sisters and brothers, and all your family. Keep in touch with your greatest supporters, your friends. Hold on to your ideals. And yes – reach for that dream.”

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Student Government President Erin Doyle is headed to Bucknell, but she won’t forget her classmates. “We are hard working, fun loving, open-minded individuals,” she said. “Although personal interests and experiences have taken us down unique paths, our struggles and triumphs have been shared by all. The support system made up of our teachers, advisors and peers has made it possible for us to overcome any obstacles we have encountered. If the goals we have reached during our time at Huntington are any indication of the successes to come, then I don’t even need to wish everyone good luck.

“We are entering the real world with the most supportive background possible, and will thrive in our new environments because of the strong foundation provided by our old. As sad as it is to be saying goodbye already, the memories we have made together and the pride we’re taking with us are reminders that wherever we’ve been and wherever we go, we are a part of Huntington’s Class of 2004.”

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Amy Burlage, who will attend the University of Richmond in the fall, used warm words to introduce valedictorian Chelsea Kocis, who also just happens to be her best friend. “Chelsea is not only an academic role model, but also an extremely talented well-rounded athlete, a person of remarkable virtue, and a true friend,” Ms. Burlage said. “Her hard work and dedication to everything she has done in the past four years is unmatchable.

“In addition to her successes both in and out of the classroom, Chelsea’s character is one of unparalleled caliber. Chelsea is so unique because she is so humble. She is always willing to help her peers understand something that they may struggle with, while never becoming frustrated that she understood it the first time. Her loyalty as a friend, work ethic, and modest personality are the key ingredients, which have warranted her success thus far and will continue to do so in the future.”

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Valedictorian Chelsea Kocis closed her address on a notably upbeat note. “No matter where we end up, we will always be Huntington High School’s Class of 2004 and we can look back on these years and smile,” she said. “Smile because we’ve met such great people. Smile because of the memories and smile because we made it and now can move on to one of the most exciting times of our lives. Thank you for making my experience here so great. I wish everyone the best of luck.”

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Salutatorian Sarah McGullam talked about musician Pete Seeger in her address. He’s a person who she thinks has made a real difference in the world, in his own way.

“Despite what some may believe,” Ms. McGullam told the crowd, “Huntington High School students are not all just apathetic teenagers. From last year’s school-wide demonstration both for and against the war in Iraq, to the instantaneous outpouring of support and donations for a student in need – this is all evidence that we care. We’re not all going to become the next Kennedy or Trump, but perhaps we, too, like Pete Seeger, will make a difference in this world that we live in.”
The Huntington High School College Office processed more than 2,000 college applications this year. It offers students and parents many helpful services including application, essay and financial aid workshops, counseling, college searches and interest inventories, hundreds of individual college guidebooks and bulletins and high speed computers and internet connections to search for schools and even to file applications online. The office also coordinates fall and spring college fairs and mini-college days throughout the year. To learn more about the College Office call 673-2131 during the school year.
Class of 2004 Senior Academic Awards

A.L.I.V.E. Outstanding Student Scholarship .............................................. Shaheim Bradshaw
Alumni Cups ..................................................... Kevin Beck, Katie Boshko
Alumni Scholarships . Jessica Ironman, Amanda Mohlenhoff
American HS Mathematics Award ................. Jackie Callahan
American Legion Citizenship Award ........ Megan O’Leary, Brandon Smoller
American Legion Music Award . Jennifer McGullam, Sarah McGullam
Atlantic Wind Symphony ......................... Sean Bennett
Bausch & Lomb Science Award . Brandon Smoller
Blue Devil Band East River Savings Service Award .......... Aimee LeMay, Amanda Mohlenhoff, Kristin Pugliese
Cal Hansen Memorial Scholarship ............ Amanda Mohlenhoff, Carmela Santorsola Provenzano
Centris-IEP Direct Award . . . . . . . . . . . . Blake Wind
Class of 1953 Scholarship .................. Alexandra Wheeler
Cold Spring Harbor/Huntington Soccer Club Scholarship ........................ Katie Boshko, Caitlin Latini, Emily Sammis
Daughters of American Revolution .......... Lisa DelGaudio, Joseph Greenstein
Dentists for a Better Huntingdon Scholarship ............ Jessica Ironman
Dorothea Wadell Scholarship ................ Megan Crawford
E.C. McGaul Award of Huntington Fire Department .................. Maria Biso
Edna Van Wart Mathematics Award .... Brandon Smoller
ESL Award .......................................................... Aramis Jimenez
Evelyn Daniels Memorial Award ................ Jennifer McGullam, Sarah McGullam
Frances Bifulco Howley Memorial Scholarship ............ Alexandra Confort
Frank Carino Award of Huntington Fire Department .......... Shawn Riley
French Award ............................................. Jennifer McGullam, Sarah McGullam
Greenlawn Volunteer Fire Department Scholarship .......... Maria Biso
HARTE Scholarship ........................................... Megan O’Leary
Howard Munson Award of Huntington Fire Department ................ Rose Cesaire
Huntington Blue Devil Band Parent Award ................. Sean Bennett
Huntington Manor Volunteer Fire Department Award ........... Jessica Ironman
Italian Award ............................................ Megan O’Leary, Vito Roseto
Jagoda Scholarship ................................. Blake Wind, Johanna Pape
James Doty Memorial Scholarship ................... Christina Bezas
James Loebell Scholarship ........................................... Amanda Mohlenhoff, Rebecca Smith
Jane Sullivan Award ........................................ Meredith Murphy
Jared Bifulco Memorial Scholarship ................ Katelyn LaMay
Joan Jorgensen Scholarship ........................ Melissa Hernandez
Joel H. & Selma D. Cohen Scholarship ........ Juan Sanchez
John Philip Sousa Award ...................... Richard Liebowitz
Josten’s Recognition Award ........................ Carol Palacio
Kurt Schaefer Memorial Award ...................... Shanelle Patterson
Long Island Blood Services Scholarship .............. Sean Millner
Louis Armstrong Jazz Award ......................... Jordan Orelli
Martin Schnittman Memorial Scholarship ........... Jessica Brown
National Orchestra Award .......................... Christina Lewis
NYS Lottery Leaders of Tomorrow ............ Lisa DelGaudio
Office of State Comptroller Award ............... Noelia Lopez
Orchestra Parents Scholarship ....................... Christina Bezas, Nicole DiBiase
Parent Appreciation Award .................. Omar Lima, Nakia Smith
Patrick Gilmore Band Award .................. Kiera McCourt
Principal’s Award ........................................ Brandon Smoller
PTSA Scholarship ........................................ Katie Boshko, Blake Wind
Ralph Thompson Scholarship .................... Melissa Hernandez
Reibe’s Art Award of Merit ...................... Kimberly Neill
Rensselaer Science Medal ........................ Matthew Sobin
Robert JR Buchanan Award ...................... Sarah McGullam
Robert K. Toaz Memorial Prize ............... Chelsea Kocis
Rotary Club Scholarship .................... Brandon Smoller
T. Christopher Pettit Memorial Scholarship ............. Pierre Delva, Chelsea Kocis
Technology Department Award ................. Juan Sanchez
Tracy Cogswell Memorial Award .................. Lee Noyes, Hayley Ryan
Tri M Music Leadership Award .................... Richard Liebowitz
Triple C – Attorney General’s Award .............. Shaheim Bradshaw, Jana Piccola
U.S. Marine Corps Scholastic Excellence Award ................. Caitlin Latini
U.S. Marine Corps “Semper Fidelis” Award ............ Sarah Sher
Unity Center of Healing Light Church Scholarship ........... Christina Lewis
Woody Herman Jazz Award ..................... Aimee LeMay
York Iguchi Scholarship .......................... Katelyn LaMay

Senior Athletic Awards

Booster Club Female Scholar Athlete ............. Chelsea Kocis
Booster Club Male Scholar Athlete .............. Matthew Sobin
William Class Memorial Scholarship .......... Kevin Beck
David Cordes Award ............................... Michael Fehrs
Fred Cambria Award ............................... Jeffrey Clowes
Ray Deren Memorial Scholarship ............... Emily Sammis, Pierre Delva
Michael McCarthy Memorial Award ............... Nadav Zamir, Shaheim Bradshaw

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Many thanks to all the local businesses and individuals who contributed to our school district clubs, teams and organizations this past school year!!!