

# **Huntington High School's 150<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **Superintendent John J. Finello's Address**

Thank you for your introduction Shayne.

Members of the Board of Education, colleagues in administration, distinguished members of the faculty, class officers, families, friends and most importantly members of the Class of 2011. It is a pleasure to stand before you as your superintendent of schools on this day of celebration, this day of graduation.

I would like to begin by talking about journeys and how sometimes the journey brings you back home. In some ways, today, for me, is about being home. On this same day in 1968, I was sitting in one of those chairs inside the auditorium. I can say with certainty that I didn't expect to be the superintendent of schools in Huntington and a commencement speaker today.

Your life journey is unpredictable and will provide challenges, rewards and joys as you travel the many bends in the road. If you master the art of listening to your mind and heart while trusting your instincts, you will greet the unexpected with wonder not fear. Look beyond the comfortable choices, be a little daring and trust in yourself.

In some ways the world you are going into, while far more prosperous is far more complex and complicated, than the one I faced in 1968. You have proven through your many accomplishments that you have acquired the

skills and knowledge to succeed. So engage your mind, your instincts and your heart in every decision you make. Engage your whole self and the journey will reveal itself with the passage of time. The lesson I learned when I chose to become a teacher was to love what you do, or don't do it. Don't make a choice because it pleases others or ranks high on someone else's scale of achievement or even because it seems to be, simply the logical thing to do at that moment on your path. Make the choice because it engages all of you.

Freedom to choose can sometimes feel like a terrible burden, but the burden is greatly lightened when you have faith in the unique individual you are, when you recognize your talents, acknowledge your shortcomings and realize you have everything you need for this journey of life.

Now let's talk about going off-roading. When you go off-road, when you start taking risks, your ambitions and limits get to know each other and implore you to reach beyond a comfortable grasp. Be ready for the unplanned experiences. Sometimes they're the very best of all. In fact, the most revealing moments are the ones that are unplanned. It's tempting to search for comfort, to play it safe but every once in a while you will get into a difficult or overwhelming situation; don't be discouraged – learn from it and move on. Realize that you cannot do everything by yourself. Seek advice, counsel and support, ask for help. Remember to return the favor, do something good for someone else.

You are about to encounter a world larger than the one that you have known. You'll audition personalities, outfits and styles until you find the one

that fits. When it comes to the world, engage it in every possible way. You will stamp your imprint in the hearts and minds of others. While you are doing this, don't be too vain, laugh at yourself. Trust me, if you don't, others will do it for you. Enliven everything you do. Leave the computer screen, put down the iPhone and get out that front door.

Thank you to the parents, guardians, family and friends, those who have sacrificed so much for today's graduates. You have done your job well. You have instilled greatness of character into the graduates seated before us. They may surprise you, puzzle you, even defy or challenge you. They may not become a doctor, lawyer, billionaire or Nobel Laureate. And that's OK. We know you have worked so hard to get your graduate to this incredible place. Today is an important day for you, time to let them go, an acknowledgement of one chapter closed. Share the pen, so they can write their own next chapter.

And finally to our graduates, remember that throughout this journey, the only limits that really matter are the ones you put on yourself. Know yourself, trust yourself, and don't blink. If you do these things, when you look back or maybe when you look down from this podium as I am right now, you will know that this journey has led to a rewarding and fulfilling life.

Thank you and congratulations to the Huntington High School Class of 2011.