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**Family, nation are Hilton graduation themes**
[Sarah F. Lascari/Messenger Post Staff](#)
[June 21, 2002](#)


**Graduates reflect on how events during their school years have shaped them.**

Members of the Hilton High School senior chorus open graduation ceremonies with the National Anthem at the Eastman Theatre in Rochester on Saturday, June 15. (STAFF PHOTO/ANMARI LINARDI)

More than 300 students of Hilton Central School received their diplomas as well as advice for the future in Saturday's patriotic-themed graduation ceremony,.

Superintendent John Cooper asked the graduates and onlookers, "What does it mean to be an American?"

A short video featuring Lee Greenwood's "Proud to be an American" song showed images surrounding the tragedy of Sept. 11, as well as those symbolic of the way in which America has come together in recent months.

Ben Wallace, a sixth-grader at Hilton's Northwood Elementary School, led the audience in singing "God Bless America."

Cooper noted that Sept. 11 focused people's thoughts on what it means to be an American, as well as redefined the definition of "hero" for many.

"It means understanding our past, both our accomplishments and our mistakes," he said. "It means working hard, understanding your values and standing up for them when necessary."

Cooper offered congratulations and what he said he hoped would be an enduring message to graduates.

"You can make a difference in your lives and the lives of others if you simply care enough to try," he said, "and care enough to persevere."

Hilton School Board President David Fisher said that commitment and sacrifice, themes embodied in the events surrounding Sept. 11, are also representative of graduation - sacrifice not only by students, but their entire communities. This includes hometowns of Hilton, Parma, Greece, and Hamlin, as well as the broader communities of Monroe County, and even the entire country.

"We probably should have had an armored truck bring that red pile (of diplomas) here to



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Eastman Theatre today. Because that pile of diplomas represents an investment of more than \$33 million dollars," from that greater community, Fisher said, reminding students to be supportive of education in the future.

English teacher Timothy Ackroyd affirmed the amount of time students have spent in school - more than six million minutes - to reach graduation. He also encouraged them to stay true to their character and work hard to achieve success.

"Quality of character is the only true road to success," Ackroyd said. He added that the class of 2002 has faced events which challenged the world, from the shootings at Colorado's Columbine High School in April 1999, to the recent terrorist attacks on America.

"You've seen things that no young adults should have to, yet you've endured, you've adapted, you are succeeding," he said.

Joshua Poole, class valedictorian, said the achievement of graduation has allowed him and his fellow students to learn, grow and become wiser from that which they have been dealt thus far in life.

"Whatever curve balls we were thrown in life," he said, "we were able to overcome them and move on."

High School Principal David Dimpleby and co-salutatorian Nicholas Earnhart reminded students of the importance of loved ones. Earnhart emphasized the role of family in a world that is full of modern conveniences.

"A healthy family life is essential for living life to its fullest, and leading a meaningful life is all anyone can ask for," he said.

Dimpleby identified five areas in life which must be continuously juggled: work, family, friends, health, and spirit. While work will bounce back if dropped, the other four are made of glass and easily broken, he said.

"Strive to balance the important things in your life," he said, "as you continuously juggle (the) competing interests and needs of each day."

Co-salutatorian Angela D'Orazio praised her fellow students, noting their good hearts and strong character.

"We've come a long way from being obnoxious freshmen to becoming strong, mature adults," D'Orazio said. "I know we're ready to make our mark on the world."

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