Salutatorian – Helen Hutchens

We are gathered today for the graduation of the Penn Manor Class of 2011, but, may I ask, what is Penn Manor? Is it just the building? The teachers and students at the high school? All the schools in the district? All the families of students? Or is it everyone who lives here? I would like to assert that it is all of the above. All of the people around us have created, cultured, and cultivated us into strong young individuals.

Penn Manor is the students sitting in this room who have surrounded us for many of the past 13 years. It is the teachers who enjoy sharing their knowledge with us and watching class after class become adults. It is our parents who build our foundations and love us no matter what. It is the adults who lead and coach us outside our classes. It is the neighbors who always take the time to exchange a smile or friendly greeting or buy your latest fundraiser. It is the older students who were role models to us, and it is the younger students that we are role models for. It is anyone who is at this ceremony or viewing this web-cast. It is a community. It is our home.  To all of you, we say “thank you”.

Each and every one of us is an integral part of our Penn Manor community. We are involved in innumerable curricular and extracurricular activities, including clubs during homerooms, religious organizations, sports, music, scouts, and service organizations.

Not only do we comprise these organizations, but we also lead them. Many of the students sitting in this room today have worked to organize and motivate their peers. They have put in the time and effort to make everything run smoothly and will be missed by the students left behind at the high school.

Each of us has also had the opportunity, or rather the obligation, to help the community through the service hours that we needed for our graduation project. Yes, they were sometimes a pain to schedule, and the paperwork was never fun, but many of us learned that we enjoy helping others.

We have given back to our elementary and middle schools by volunteering after school as tutors, or volunteering with other after school programs. We have worked with younger children as counselors at summer camps, leaders of church groups, coaches for elementary sports teams, and helpers in scouting groups. We have made our community more beautiful by cleaning roads, gardening in parks, and helping to build the Starry Night Mosaic. We have helped outside our community by sending cranes to Japan, buying animals for disadvantaged communities, and sending care packages to soldiers.

Everyone here has contributed to the Penn Manor community. Now we have reached a fork in the road where we will travel on different paths. These paths will lead us to other communities where we will make a difference. Our experiences here at Penn Manor have taught us how to help, how to care, and how to integrate ourselves into the world. But we will always be part of Penn Manor. And Penn Manor will always be part of us.   
Thank you.