

# PIONEER POST

## East Grand Rapids Alumni Newsletter



THE 13th COMMUNITY SERVICE AND DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS DINNER

Wednesday, September 13, 2023  
JW Marriott, Grand Rapids, MI



Honoring Betsy Willey and Bill Spindle  
Get your tickets at [egrsf.org](http://egrsf.org)

### Get Your Tickets for September 13 Awards Dinner

Join your friends and neighbors for a fabulous night celebrating service and world affairs!

Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are now available for the Foundation's Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards dinner! On Wednesday, September 13, lifelong community supporter Betsy Willey will be honored with the Community Service and Leadership Award. Climate and Energy Journalist and former Wall Street Journal Middle East Bureau Chief Bill Spindle (EGRHS class of '81) will receive the Distinguished Alumni Award. The dinner will be at the JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids. [Get your tickets on our website.](#)

For 60 years, lifelong community supporter **Betsy Wood Willey** (EGRHS class of '64) has been giving back. A former teacher and author, Betsy was a co-founder of the Leadership and Youth Development program at East Grand Rapids High School. She has served as President of both the Mary Free Bed Guild and the EGRHS PTSA, served on the boards of Universal Health Solutions, Camp Newaygo, and Arts in Motion, and for more than 20 years, Betsy led students and adults into the wilderness of the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. As a lifelong environmentalist, activist, and teacher, Betsy educates others on climate change and the degradation of the earth. As a community leader, Betsy models activism, wisdom, caring, integrity, and wholeheartedness as she brings out the best in those she mentors.

**Bill Spindle** (EGRHS class of '81) has covered some of the most pressing issues of our time during his more than 30 years as a leading journalist. For more than two decades, he worked for the Wall Street Journal, based in Tokyo, New York, Rome, Dubai, and New Delhi while reporting from more than 30 countries from Latin America to China. He's worked for Newsday and Bloomberg News, and his work has appeared in The Atlantic, Fortune, and the New York Review of Books. Bill was also part of the leadership team that established The National, a newspaper in the United Arab Emirates. For the last several years, Bill has written about climate and energy, first as an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, then at Semafor, and now as senior global correspondent for Cipher by Breakthrough Energy.

Visit [the Awards Dinner page on our website](#) to buy tickets or sponsor this gala event.

[Get Tickets!](#)



### Slate of Reunions, Homecoming on the Way

**Class of 1958** | 65th Reunion - September 29-30

**Class of 1962** | 60th +1 Reunion - October 13

**Class of 1963** | 60th Reunion - September 22-23

**Class of 1968** | 55th Reunion - September 23

**Class of 1973** | 50th Reunion - October 6-7

**Class of 1983** | 40th Reunion - September 30

**Class of 1993** | 30th Reunion - September 29-30

**Class of 2002** | 20th +1 Reunion - October 21

**Class of 2008** | 15th Reunion - September 8

**Class of 2013** | 10th Reunion - November 25

**Class of 2018** | 5th Reunion - November 22

**Homecoming | Friday and Saturday, September 29-30**

**All alumni are invited to come to the parade Friday afternoon, attend the football game Friday night, and tour your town on Saturday. Make sure you stop by the Alumni Tent on Gerken Plaza at the football game to spin our prize wheel to win some East merch!**

Find more reunion information on our [Events and Class News pages](#). The Foundation provides reunion planning support for all East classes. [Contact Maria Allen](#), Alumni Relations Coordinator for more information.



### Excellence in Teaching, Nicholas Award Winners

Congratulations to our Excellence in Teaching award winners, Andrea Eggert (elementary) and Maggie Edison '08 (secondary); and James and Georgia Nicholas Endowed Award for a Teacher of Math, Science, or Technology winner, Patrick Reed!



[egrsf.org](http://egrsf.org)

### This Year, for Our Birthday, We're Asking You to Support Our Mission

For 40 years since 1983, the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation has been supporting our schools. Thanks to our donors, we've contributed millions of dollars to help our students.

During students' time in East Grand Rapids Schools from kindergarten through graduation, the Foundation will contribute more than \$6 million to their education. This year alone, we'll provide \$650,000 to our schools.

Together, we're enriching the experience of all students by investing in programs and educational enhancements that support the whole child. At the same time, we're redefining excellence so all students can reach their full potential.

[Join us. For our birthday, we're asking for a present for our community's future.](#)

[Donate Now](#)





## Save the Date for Alumni Hockey Game 11/24

Time to get your skates sharpened and tape your stick. The annual Alumni Hockey Game will be at Patterson Ice Center at 4pm on Friday, November 24. What better way could there be to burn off all those calories from Thanksgiving than to lace 'em up and hit the ice with your fellow Pioneers? [Registration will be available soon on the Alumni Hockey Game page on our website.](#)



## A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Betsy Willey '64

Community champion Betsy Willey will be honored with the Foundation's Community Service Award at our Awards Dinner Wednesday, September 13 at the JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids. [You can purchase tickets or become a sponsor of the event on our website.](#)

**You can only have one: Rose's caramel corn, an ice cream cone from Jersey Junction, or a Yesterdog. Which do you choose?**

I have great memories of getting Rose's caramel corn when that was all they offered but my favorite is Jersey Junction! It is unchanged after all these years and I still am enjoying it with grandkids.

**What was your path from East Grand Rapids to where you are now in life?**

I graduated from U-M in 1968, majoring in English & History with a teaching certificate. I taught middle school in Livonia, MI while my husband, Larry, attended U-M Law School. After law school, we lived in Chicago with our young son, Dave, and then moved to Hawaii for a glorious year. Our daughter, Sarah, was born there. The next move was to Washington DC for six years during a very interesting time - Watergate. We moved back to Grand Rapids in 1978 to be closer to my mother. I started taking classes to renew my teaching certificate and our son, Dan, was born. When Coach Barcheski was in the hospital, I took over his classes and then stayed on at the high school for 11 years teaching English, Social Studies and Leadership classes. My career path changed in 2000 when I became certified in Healing Touch and received a certificate in spiritual direction from The Dominican Center. Since then, I have enjoyed teaching classes in interfaith spirituality and leading retreats using my book, *Footprints of the Soul, A Creative Guide For Spiritual Journey Groups and Individuals*.

**What specific thing did you learn in East that has enabled you to be successful?**

I grew up in a neighborhood with lots of kids and parents who created a supportive community. When my father died suddenly when I was four, the neighborhood surrounded my family with love and support. I learned how important it is to create community in many ways and this formed my way of being in the world. I still have several groups I enjoy facilitating.

**What were you like in school?**

In elementary school, I was very shy and quiet but had a few close friends at Lakeside who are still connected and important to me. Even though there were no women's sports at the high school, I had a positive experience through various clubs and student council.

**Did you have a favorite teacher or class?**

Shirley Menninga for senior English. She inspired me to major in English and become a teacher.

**If you had to choose one moment in one location to serve as the signature moment of your East school experience, what would it be?**

Being the first senior class to attend our new high school. We spent the first three years of high school at Wealthy Elementary and I have lots of fun memories of dances in that gym and swim meets in the old pool.

**What do you know now that you wish you'd known then?**

How important and formative my growing up years in East were. When I left for college, I thought I would not come back but from an older perspective, I appreciate our beautiful community. I also wish I'd been more exposed to the rich diversity of the world. When I taught at East, I sponsored the Multicultural Youth Ambassadors and we interacted with students from all over the Grand Rapids area. We attended a PeaceJam International Conference in Denver and heard from the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu.

**Do you stay in touch with many people from East Grand Rapids?**

Yes, our class has had great reunions and we're planning our 60th for next year. Several of us have stayed close through the years.

**What advice do you have for young East alums who are just starting out?**

Stay in touch with friends & find ways to contribute to your community.

**Who else would you like us to have a virtual cup of coffee with?**

Susan Wittenbach (class of '64), John Sebastian (class of '63).

**Bonus question: What are you glad we didn't ask you about?**

Embarrassing moments like when I fell downstairs at a formal in front of everyone.



East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation, 2915 Hall Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49506, [egrsf.org](http://egrsf.org)

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