

# Old Alumni Association FALL 2022





# East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation





### VIRTUAL CUP OF COFFEE

### Jack Becker '94

Lieutenant Commander Jack Becker '94 attended the United States Naval Academy and then became a career naval aviator, flying the F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet. After retiring from the Navy, he formed Flight Level Solutions, a company that helps organizations perform with fighter pilot-like precision. Becker is also a wide-body captain for FedEx Express.

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

Yesterdog. Oh how I miss that on the east coast!

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

After graduating from EGRHS in 1994, I attended the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. My years at Annapolis were amazing. I was the assistant captain of the hockey team, and walked on the Div. 1 football team. I graduated with a B.S. in political science in 1998, and was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Navy. From there, I attended flight school in Pensacola, FL, Corpus Christi, TX, and Meridian, MS. I completed the Navy's Advanced Jet Training Pipeline as a Distinguished Graduate and a member of the Commodore's List with Distinction. I earned my naval aviator "Wings of Gold," and chose to fly the (then) latest and greatest fighter jet, the F/A-18 Hornet.

I spent a career, both active duty and in the naval reserve, flying the F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet. Early in my career, I flew 29 combat missions in the middle east. And through some very good fortune, I was given the opportunity to become an instructor pilot. I was also chosen two summers in a row as an airshow demonstration pilot, performing at airshows

across the country in the F/A-18. I remained an instructor pilot for the remainder of my career. I retired from the naval reserve in 2018.

I stayed close to my fighter pilot roots by founding a company, Flight Level Solutions, Inc. My team at FLS aids corporations and associations in reducing mistakes and performing with fighter pilot-like precision. I am very lucky to give keynote speeches and workshops to thousands every year.

To satisfy my flying itch, I am a Captain at FedEx. I am a Line Check Airman (instructor pilot) on the MD-11 wide-body aircraft. It is an amazing job that allows me to fly literally all around the world.

I live in Virginia Beach, VA with my beautiful wife, three amazing young daughters, and a dopey golden retriever.

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

From East athletics specifically, I learned the tenacity and drive that has allowed me to become who I am today.

### What were you like in school?

In school, I was a bit of a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. I was very active in sports, playing football, hockey, and tennis. I also performed in the Talent Show and the graduation baccalaureate playing the piano and singing.

# Did you have a favorite teacher or class?

I really liked physics class with Mr. Jenkins.

# 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?

Winning the football state championship in the Pontiac Silverdome our senior year was unforgettable. What an awesome experience.

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

What a truly special place East Grand Rapids really is. I think that is simply taken for granted by those raised there... but it is magical.

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

I stay in touch with several of my childhood friends from EGR. I even get Friday night football updates from one of them! Thanks Bub!

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

Treasure your time at East, but go out and see the world! Try new things and find your passion!

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

Jim Boylen - former NBA coach

### Bonus question:

### What are you glad we didn't ask you about?

My callsign! Real callsigns in the Navy are not like Maverick and Iceman. They are normally very derogatory and embarrassing. You don't choose your own. It is assigned by the other pilots in your squadron. My callsign is not politically correct, so that stays a secret for now.

Want to read more? Visit egrsf.org/coffee.





### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE**

Our schools' "Tradition of Excellence" is part of who we are. We want to win awards and spelling bees and scholarships and state championships. We want to be the best. Our Tradition of Excellence drives us. It motivates us. And, sometimes, it defines us.

Excellence means different things to different people though, of course. We will always celebrate and encourage our extraordinary students, artists, and athletes, but not everyone will be valedictorian, first chair violinist, and the leading scorer on the lacrosse team. For many people, it's far more important to be "their best" than it is to be "the best."

For our schools, that may be the best way to define excellence. An excellent school district is one that strives to have all its students realize their full potential. We want to support our students from their first years in school to enable them to be the best they can be. We want to support the whole child in all areas—from wellness support and training to reading support, from core academic subjects to physical education, art, language, and music—to allow every child to achieve success.

Providing those opportunities for success is what the Foundation has been doing for nearly 40 years. Classroom enhancements that change the way our teachers teach and our children learn. Leading edge programs like the Middle School Innovation Lab and the High School Gone Boarding class. Support for Robotics, Science Olympiad, Quiz Bowl, We the People, and other teams. Funding for fine arts and performing arts.

Thanks to our donors, we provide avenues for students to discover their passions and find their own definition of success. We want to prepare our students to be eager, enthusiastic learners so they can get the most out of everything our schools make available to them.

We want to help our schools redefine our Tradition of Excellence so it applies to all our students. When all our children have every opportunity to be their best, that's how we'll define success: a tradition of excellence for all.

Amy Stuursma



### **AWARDS**

# **Excellence in Teaching Award Recipients** August 16, 2022

Redefining excellence. That's what these teachers are doing every day. We're proud to honor this year's recipient of the James and Georgia Nicholas Endowed Award for Math, Science and Technology, high school math teacher Elisha Murphy; and Excellence in Teaching Award recipients, high school social studies teacher Tad VandenBrink, Breton Downs third grade teacher Jenny Bergstrom, and Breton Downs kindergarten and former special education teacher Nicole Vanderplow. Congratulations to all!



# EAST GRAND RAPIDS SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

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# MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDATION PRESIDENT

As I start my sixth and final year serving on the Foundation Board, I continue to be amazed by the incredible support our community has shown for the Foundation and our schools. We have rallied behind our schools to ensure that our children are able to flourish and succeed. Your unwavering support has allowed the Foundation to work with our schools to provide educational programs and academic enhancements that all students need to achieve their full potential.

Now, our schools and students are confronted with new obstacles. It's clear to parents, educators, community members, and the students themselves that it is not enough to provide academic opportunities— it is important that we focus on supporting the "whole child." And supporting the "whole child" means providing not only educational support, but also support for students' mental health and emotional well-being.

This support is critically important as we are experiencing a nationwide epidemic of mental illness among children. East Grand Rapids has not escaped this disturbing trend— in the past two years, our own school district has seen unprecedented numbers of students needing mental health support, counseling, and treatment. The need for additional resources to support the "whole child" has never been greater.

Thanks to our donors, the Foundation is honored to partner with our schools to meet this need. In June, the Foundation committed to fund \$750,000 over the next three years to support students' mental and emotional health and well-being at all our schools. To provide for future needs, the Foundation has created a dedicated fund, jumpstarted by an alumni donor, for all to support..

Like true pioneers, we are at the forefront of addressing the student mental health crisis. One month after we made our commitment, the State of Michigan made a similar commitment to support students' mental health statewide. This new government funding may enable the Foundation to redeploy our resources to address future needs. Thanks to donors like you, though, our district got a months-long head start on finding the best people available for this vital work.

Without you, the Foundation's commitment to support the "whole child" would not be possible. As we like to say, "The future belongs to Pioneers." Thanks to our donors, our Pioneers will have not only the educational and academic tools, but also the mental health and emotional support necessary to seize that future.

 $- \ \mathsf{Beth} \ \mathsf{Skaggs}$ 

the Louise Neesley Legacy Society:

MURPHY AINSWORTH^10 **BOB^ & VAL BERNECKER REN BRANDER '55 BARBARA CONE** DAVID^ '57 & NANCY COOK PETER CORONEOS^ '96 LINDA KEHM^ DAVE '57 & LINDA^ MEHNEY LOUISE HITT NEESLEY^ MARJORIE NEUBIG^ THE PETER^ & JOAN SECCHIA FAMILY **RICH & ABBY SOROTA** JANET L. STAUSS^ KAREN STEFFENSEN STURGES^ '58 PETER '89 & AMY '89 STUURSMA WILLIAM^ & SHIRLEY^ VANDENBERG WILLIAM^ '56 & PATRICIA WARING

^Deceased

# PLANNED GIVING | A Present to the Future

Will you make the world a better place? Will you make a difference? How will you be remembered? By including the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation in your estate planning, you can be an enduring part of a brighter future for our community. Making a commitment to our schools today will give our students a better tomorrow.

The Louise Neesley Legacy Society, named for an East resident who understood the powerful, positive difference the Foundation can make in our public schools, recognizes people who have pledged to include the Foundation in their estate plans.

Including the Foundation in your will is just one way to make a planned gift. There are many more, including charitable trusts and donor advised funds, both of which may have significant tax advantages. Planned gifts can come in the form of money, property, an individual investment, or a percentage of an estate.

To add your name to the Louise Neesley Legacy Society, please call EGRSF Executive Director Amy Stuursma at (616)235-3535 or email her at astuursm@egrps.org. She'd love to talk to you about how you can make your last gift a gift that lasts forever.



## MY LEGACY | Barbara Cone

Barbara Cone has always known the value of education. As a child, before heading to the beach, her father had her study wave patterns. When she entered the University of Michigan in 1955, she was one of only a dozen women in that year's engineering class of 1,300 students. And, for the past 37 years, Cone has been tutoring for the East Grand Rapids Public Schools. It just makes sense, then, that Cone, who is now a sprightly 85 years old, plans to include the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation in her estate plans. After all, the Foundation has been working on behalf of East students as long as Cone has.

After tutoring privately for years, Cone started working for EGRPS after her sons, Tim and Michael, graduated from East. "The district wanted to help students who were struggling, so they asked me to start a tutoring program," Cone says. "I've tutored kids on every street in town. Even that street that only has one house on it." Now, Cone wants to make sure future East students have access to the same opportunities she's been providing since 1985. Including the Foundation in her estate plans will do just that.

"That's my legacy," Cone says proudly. "I want to fund programs for those kids who need a little extra help. There are always going to be kids who struggle. Giving to the Foundation fits with my sense of community, of doing things together, to help each other. I want that to be what people remember about me."





# TREASURER'S REPORT

When I joined the Foundation board just a few years ago, we were in the middle of the EGR Now&Forever campaign. This was our largest campaign ever, with the goal of transforming the Foundation to permanently support school programs that were in danger of being cut.

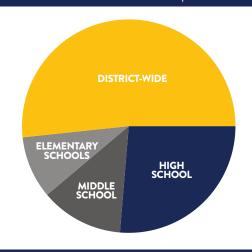
Thanks to our generous community, that campaign was a huge success. As you can see from the charts on this page, the Foundation's endowment has grown to more than \$12 million. As a result of that growth, we've been able to increase the amount of money we contribute to our district to more than half a million dollars this year.

Today, our discussions with the leaders of the district have shifted from "What can we save?" to "What can we add or bring back?" It has been especially gratifying to see this success for our students.

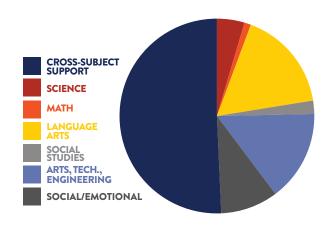
- Nick Adamy



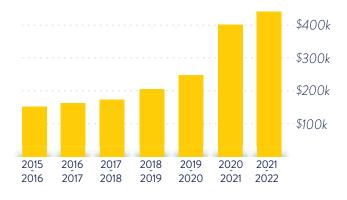
# FUNDING BY BUILDING | 2019-2022



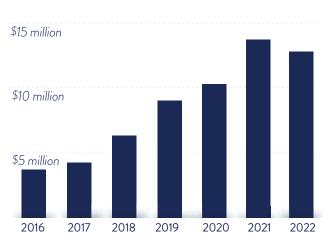
# **FUNDING BY SUBJECT** | 2018-2022



# **ENDOWMENT DISTRIBUTIONS TO EGRPS**









Donate to Jimmy's Friendship Fund quickly and easily by scanning the QR code then selecting "Jimmy's Friendship Fund." Thank you!

# JIMMY'S FRIENDSHIP FUND | Offering Opportunity For All

The Foundation has always been about opportunity. Whether funding program support and classroom enhancements for our students or professional development for our teachers and staff, we've always strived to provide educational opportunities in our district that are second to none.

There are families in our district, though, who face tough choices about the opportunities available to their kids. Choices between paying fees to join a school club or paying for new shoes for school. Choices between paying for car repairs or paying to travel to a music competition.

Now, the Foundation is working to make sure everyone in our district has access to every opportunity our schools have to offer. **Jimmy's Friendship Fund**-named in honor of Jimmy Gerken-will provide money to cover immediate needs for families within the district that are experiencing financial difficulties. The funds may be used to cover pay-to-participate expenses for extracurriculars, student activity fees, household needs, or personal needs.

Jimmy's Friendship Fund will be administered by the Foundation through the Jimmy Gerken Fund, which has been supporting athletics and co-curricular activities for almost 15 years. School principals will allocate the funds based on needs they see. Families may also contact school principals or the Foundation as needs arise. Our goal is to make these funds available to the people who need them, without any stigma attached to asking for them.

We're calling the fund Jimmy's Friendship Fund because Jimmy Gerken was a friend to all and friendship was near and dear to his heart. Jimmy was an East resident and then staff member with special needs. One of his most famous quotes is his response to someone who was bullying him about his special needs: "That's okay," Jimmy said. "I'll still be your friend."



August 2022: Lakeside's Class of 2035 at a PTO-organized playground meet-up.



# **GRANT HIGHLIGHTS** | SPRING 2022

# **Donors Help Create Middle School Broadcasting Studio**

For years, East high school students interested in broadcasting have been able to participate in Primetime Pioneers, a video student news program. Now, thanks to our donors and a grant from the Foundation, students at the middle school will have a similar opportunity.

Middle School teacher Derek Dean applied for the grant this spring. He's excited about how students will benefit from it. "This grant will provide the broadcasting and video production courses with updated equipment to produce student news and other content that helps develop the school community," Dean says.

The grant paid for new cameras, microphones, a tricaster, tripods, lights and other equipment that created a new 4K studio at the middle school. "This equipment allows the students to develop a publication with students recording and interviewing in the field as well as recording in a studio with equipment that emulates the industry."

# Elementary Libraries Restocked Thanks to Grant from Foundation

The COVID pandemic brought unexpected challenges to nearly every part of our school district. The Learning Commons (formerly libraries) at Breton Downs, Lakeside, and Wealthy were no exception. With professional librarians long gone due to years-ago budget cuts, and no volunteers available due to safety precautions, the Learning Commons in each elementary school suffered. As restrictions lifted, and volunteers returned to schools, Learning Commons volunteers applied for a grant from the Foundation to replenish the shelves by replacing missing books and acquiring new ones. In January, the grant was approved, and the collection at each Learning Commons is being replenished.

"The Learning Commons Inventory Revitalization Grant that was approved by the Foundation has enabled us to purchase hundreds of new books," says Dana Parent, a volunteer at the Wealthy Elementary Learning Commons. "We have been able to purchase non-fiction books to support current student interests, supplement classroom teaching units and replace outdated content.

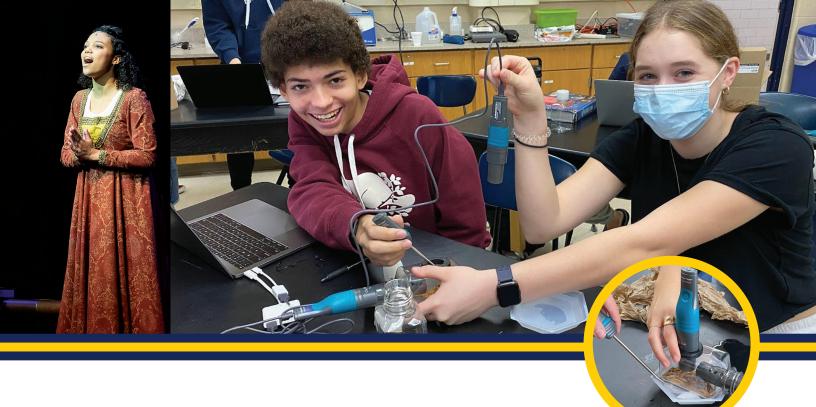
"We have also been able to purchase many recent award-winning and honorary fiction books, new titles in popular fiction series as well as many of the books on our student request list. Students and teachers are thrilled to have a new selection of books available to check out in all sections of the Learning Commons, keeping students engaged and motivated to read and learn."

# Foundation Grant Was Instrumental to Spring Musical's Success

EGRPS music teacher Bree Mitchell is clever. Just look at how she describes a Foundation grant to hire professional musicians to play along with students at the high school musical: "Hiring professional musicians for our Pit Orchestra for the high school's production of Once Upon a Mattress was instrumental to the musical's success." Get it? Instrumental. Very clever.

"The musicals EGR performs are created with classically trained musicians in mind, so having the assistance of professional musicians ups the caliber of our shows and also allows for professional coaching for students from music professionals other than their band, orchestra and choir teacher," Mitchell continues. "The experience of live theater is unlike any other in terms of the work it takes to prepare a show, all the people who are involved in making a show successful and the feelings that students have in performing a show and sharing a whole new world with an audience.

"Bringing characters to life with music is challenging, but magical and we are very thankful that the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation supported the Drama department in making our show the very best!" In all, the Foundation, thanks to our donors, contributed \$9,000 to the spring musical. That's just one example of how we're committed to supporting both fine and performing arts in all our schools. Thank you for making that possible!



# Foundation Grant Funds New Science Data Collection Devices at the High School

High school science teacher Janyce Huff says the new data collection devices funded by a grant from the Foundation last fall have been invaluable during hands-on experiments. "All biology classes have used the carbon dioxide and oxygen probes when studying cellular respiration and photosynthesis," Huff says. "The data collected allowed students to calculate the rates of respiration and photosynthesis. They then could vary the conditions (different temperatures, acidic or basic conditions, amount of light) and determine the effect on the rates of these critical life processes."

IB biology students used conductivity probes to determine the amount of material that diffused across a selectively permeable membrane. "This was a new and novel way to quantitatively measure movement of molecules that hadn't been available to use prior to the purchase of these probes," Huff says.

Other equipment will be used for different projects, Huff says. Chemistry students will be using PH probes to quantify the relationships between acids and bases and how one can neutralize the other during this second semester study. The PAR probes determine the amount of photosynthetic light that is available to a plant. These probes were used in photosynthesis labs and as a way to justify the rate of photosynthesis under different types and colors of light.

Biology classes have an ongoing study of Reeds Lake water characteristics that are making use of these probes to determine the quality of water in our local lake. The probes allow for an accurate and quantitative determination of the chemical composition of the lake's water. "In science, we teach many concepts that are to be understood in both qualitative and quantitative ways," Huff says. "The qualitative manner can be taught in a variety of ways but the quantitative manner requires numerical data that is measured by the students. The more accurately we can measure and record data, the more students can apply the many math skills they have learned. These devices allow for increased engagement in the science they are learning by showing the amount of change. An added benefit is that it affirms the math they have learned and allows them to see the real world application of their math learning.

"There are many science topics that deal with very large numbers and also very small numbers. Measuring distance and time in the global world is fairly well understood by students. When we start measuring the amounts of change in carbon dioxide or oxygen in the parts per million range, students can see that a significant change that affects living organisms can actually be measured in very small numbers. Having devices that can measure in the parts per million range is critical in assisting students' understanding of what a significant change is in biological systems. Each of the probes allows for a deeper understanding of the lesson that is being taught. They provide a tangible demonstration of a concept that can sometimes be difficult to visualize. As an example, one such concept is the movement of heat.

"The effect of temperature is a significant discussion in all our science classes. In chemistry, temperature affects reactions and their rates, changes in states of matter, and chemical cycles in the atmosphere. In biology and physics, temperature is equally important in all aspects of these process studies as well. It has been difficult to obtain accurate temperature readings since mercury thermometers were removed from schools. The Vernier temperature probes allow for chemistry, biology, and physics labs to achieve the accuracy needed to understand the effects of temperature.

"The field of science is ever changing. The science learned during the Covid pandemic is a prime example of how science grows and changes rapidly. As science teachers, we are continually updating our knowledge and skills. The use of materials that allow us to demonstrate concepts to our students using state-of-the-art measuring devices enhances our teaching and the students' learning. We are grateful for the Foundation's support of our efforts!"



# CLASS OF 1952 | True Pioneers: Seventy Years!

The Class of 1952 held its 70-year reunion Thursday, September 8 at the Grand Rapids Yacht Club. "Whoever was in charge of planning the weather for that day did a wonderful job," says Betty Jo Crosby, who helped plan the event.

Of the 36 remaining members of the class, more than a third were able to attend in person, and a virtual option was available too. "We had people come in from Florida and New Mexico," Crosby says. "We had a lovely luncheon at the Yacht Club. Gail Snow was our speaker. She's the author of *Remarkable Ramona Park* and *Rakish Reeds Lake*, two books about the history of East Grand Rapids. It was a fascinating talk!"

Later in the day, the party continued at Kent Country Club. "We just had a great time seeing everyone," Crosby says. Will there be a 75th reunion? Crosby says the group won't start thinking about that until they see how they're doing closer to 2027.

# IN MEMORIUM | Class of 1972 Memorial Gift

At its 50th Reunion, the Class of 1972 made a memorial gift to the Foundation in honor of the members of the class who have passed away:

Robert Ballard
Spencer Barnes
Marjorie (White) Bauer
Steven Bruce
James Deeb
David Dunning
Louise (Chase) Evans
Rick Fogel
Jay Germain
Kathryn (Williams) Greimer
Barbara (Dixon) Hamilton
Robert Harrison
Drusilla Hillman-Richard
Cynthia (VanCoevering) Hutchinson
Steven Lampert

John Leroux

Steven Love Daniel Lovingfoss Mike Magrille John McMullen Sherilyn Miller Douglas Mossman Randall Petter Janet Remien Thomas Ricker Daniel Scherruble M. Fay Terzes Stephen Turney David Ver Meulen Denice (Mulvihill) Verdon Mike Wolf Wayne Zuidema











**2022 Gerken Open** June 8, 2022

Last spring's Gerken Open was the biggest and best one yet! Once again, the afternoon 18-hole event sold out well in advance of the outing. There were also 40 golfers who participated in the morning 9-hole event, bringing the total number of participants to 168.

Every year, the Foundation and the EGR Team Boosters join together for the Gerken Open at Thousand Oaks Golf Club. The event supports the Boosters and the Gerken Fund, which was established to remember Jimmy Gerken and ensure that athletics and co-curriculars—the activities Jimmy loved most—remain an integral part of our students' education.

A portion of the proceeds from the 2022 Gerken Open will also support a new fund, Jimmy's Friendship Fund, that will help extend opportunity to everyone in our district (more information about Jimmy's friendship fund appears on page 7 of this issue). Thank you to everyone who helped make the 2022 Gerken Open such a success! Save the date for the 2023 Gerken Open on **Wednesday, June 7, 2023**.

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Homecoming** October 7-8, 2022

Mark your calendars! On Friday, come to the Homecoming Parade and football game versus Forest Hills Northern. On Saturday, stay for the home freshman volleyball invitational and field hockey game and to revisit your old stomping grounds. We'll have an Alumni Tent at the football game Friday night. Stop by to meet up with your fellow Pioneers! (There's even a rumor we'll have a "spin to win" prize wheel there!)

## Community Service & Distinguished Alumni Awards Nominations

Every two years, the Foundation honors worthy individuals with the Distinguished Alumni Award and the Community Service Award at our Awards Dinner. Last fall, CDR Bill Krissoff, MD, Medical Corps, United States Navy (Ret.) of the class of 1964 was our Distinguished Alumni honoree. Longtime EGRPS custodian Bruce Towne received the Community Service Award.

Now we're looking for nominees to be honored at our Awards Dinner in 2023. The Distinguished Alumni honoree must be an East alum. The Community Service honoree can be, but it's not required. Nominees for the Distinguished Alumni Award should have made significant contributions to their chosen field, but those contributions need not be well known or well publicized. For the Community Service Award, nominees should have done something remarkable for the greater good. Nomination forms (due December 1) are available on our website, egrsf.org.

CDR Bill Krissoff, MD, Medical Corps, United States Navy (Ret.) & Bruce Towne

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