

# THE PIONEER POST



EAST GRAND RAPIDS ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



## Reunions and Homecoming on the Calendar

There are seven reunions planned for this summer, and fall:

- [1965 September 12-13](#)
- [1975 September 26-27](#)
- [1985 October 11](#)
- [1995 September 12-13](#)
- [2015 November 26](#)
- [2020 November 26](#)

If you don't have a reunion this year--or even if you do--come to **Homecoming on September 12**. Visit for the parade in the afternoon, the football game versus Grand Rapids Christian Friday night, and stop by our alumni tent on Gerken Plaza during the game to say hi, meet up with your fellow Pioneers, and grab some East Alumni merch.

Want help planning your next reunion? Contact Maria Allen, the Foundation's Alumni Relations Coordinator, at [mallen@egrps.org](mailto:mallen@egrps.org). It's time to reconnect, reminisce, and celebrate the memories that shaped you.

## EAST ALUMNI chicago

### Happy Hour

**THURSDAY | OCT. 16, 2025**

**GASLIGHT BAR**  
2450 N CLARK ST. | CHICAGO, IL  
**6:00 - 8:00 PM**

**RSVP to**  
[mallen@egrps.org](mailto:mallen@egrps.org)  
**by 10/10/25**

**East Grand Rapids  
Schools Foundation**  
[egrps.org](http://egrps.org)  
MAKING OUR SCHOOLS EVEN BETTER TOGETHER

*Complimentary beverage and  
appetizers for East Alumni.  
Happy Hour prices*

## Chicago Alumni Happy Hour in October

Join your fellow Windy City Pioneers for an East Alumni Happy Hour Thursday, October 16, from 6-8pm at the appropriately named Gaslight Bar in Lincoln Park. We'll have complimentary appetizers and your first drink is on us, with happy hour prices available after that. [RSVP to Maria Allen by October 10](#). Hope to see you there!



## Amazing Library Gift from the Class of 1962

George Vogt '62 was in his house in Georgia when he had an epiphany. "I was looking at this wall of books," Vogt says, "and I thought, 'Students should have these.'"

Fast forward to this summer. Vogt decided to donate his entire collection of Library of America volumes--more than 400 books--to East Grand Rapids High School on behalf of the class of 1962.

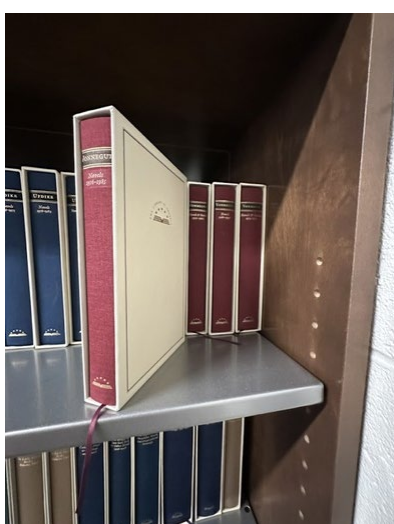
It was a remarkable gift, worth thousands of dollars. The only problem: The books were at Vogt's house in Greensboro, Georgia, 874 miles from East Grand Rapids. That's where Vogt's classmate, Henry "Fritz" Schaefer III, and his wife, Karen (Rasmussen) Schaefer '63 came in. They offered to help pay to ship the books to the high school.

Now the books occupy an entire section of the high school library. Each book holds a label that reads, "Gift from members of the EGRHS class of 1962 in honor of our outstanding teachers."

"Personally, my experience at EGR was amazing," Vogt says. "I had some remarkable teachers. I learned a lot about writing from Bert Froyland. I owe him a debt. Marie Yonkman and Margaret Douse too. I had great French teachers as well. It was a very good college preparatory experience."

Vogt is a historian who has worked at the National Archives in Washington, DC, as well as directing the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and the Oregon Historical Society. Fritz Schaefer is currently the Graham Perdue Professor of Chemistry and Director of the Center for Computational Quantum Chemistry at the University of Georgia. Karen is a Latin teacher.

Together, Vogt and the Schaeferes have made an incredible contribution to EGRHS students now and for years to come, all on behalf of the class of 1962. Thank you!



## Amy (Cook) Stuursma '89 Leaving the EGR Schools Foundation at the Top

After seventeen years at the Foundation, EGRSF Executive Director Amy Stuursma is leaving the organization.

To say the Foundation has been transformed under Stuursma's leadership would be a vast understatement. By any measure--community involvement, funds raised, contributions to our schools--the Foundation has grown tremendously during Stuursma's time at the helm. The EGRSF endowment is the largest of any public school foundation in Michigan, enabling the Foundation to contribute more than \$700,000 to our schools this year.

"There's never a good time to leave," Stuursma says, "but the Foundation is in a strong and stable position. We have an experienced staff, accomplished board members, and a community of dedicated donors who understand that our schools are at the heart of East Grand Rapids."

Stuursma will take on new challenges in the newly created position of Executive Director of the Mary Free Bed Guild.

"One of my favorite parts of my job has been engaging with so many of our alumni," Stuursma says. "It's an incredibly supportive group. The Foundation truly would not be able to do what it does without our alumni. And for our alumni, supporting the Foundation is a great way to make sure future Pioneers have the same opportunity to achieve their own personal excellence that we all did."

"It has been an honor to lead an organization so deeply rooted in our community, and committed to education, our students and staff. Together we have created a Foundation that will support excellence for today's students and for generations to come."





# Foundation Presents Teacher Awards

This year's Excellence in Teaching Award recipients are Breton Downs Elementary reading specialist Andrea Dudley at the elementary level and EGRHS science teacher Heather Carlson at the secondary level. Lakeside Elementary first grade teacher Kailey Faris was honored with the James and Georgia Nicholas Endowed Award for a Teacher of Math, Science, or Technology.

"We're fortunate to have so many outstanding teachers that it's always difficult to single any out for these awards," says EGRSF Board of Directors President Amy Knape, who presented the awards along with EGRSF Executive Director Amy Stuursma. "That makes this honor even more special for the teachers we recognized."

"The teachers who received these awards exemplify how the district, the Foundation, and our community are making our schools even better together," Knape says.

[You can nominate teachers for the Foundation's awards on our website](#) up until May 1.

# Former Foundation Student Board Member Will Allen '24 Is World Champion Cup Stacker

Watch the video below, but don't blink or you'll miss it!



# Outdoor Volleyball, Lowell Rivalry Kick Off Fall Season

The second annual "Rally on Reeds" outdoor volleyball game will be at Memorial Field Wednesday, August 20, the same night the Foundation is providing volunteers for The Taste of East Grand Rapids in Gaslight Village. Friday night lights return to Memorial Field on August 28 as East renews its rivalry with Lowell. Other highlights on the fall schedule include the Homecoming football game versus Grand Rapids Christian September 12 and the Hearts of Gold game against Forest Hills Central October 24.

**To see the full spring schedule of East Grand Rapids High School sports, visit [egrpioneers.org](http://egrpioneers.org).**



# Drama Department Announces 2025-26 Season

This year's high school fall play will be "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" November 6-8 in the Performing Arts Center. "Seussical: The Musical" will be the big show of the spring April 30-May 2.

This is another big year for the performing arts in all our schools. In response to a request from the district, the Foundation is providing nearly \$100,000 per year for the next two years to support a new drama director, production support, and performances in all our schools.

Thank you, Foundation donors, for providing this opportunity for all our students to participate in these productions!



# A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Jeff Kagan '97

*Jeff majored in Zoology at Michigan State University with an unwavering intent to study medicine. He prepared to take the MCAT for admission into Medical School before veering mightily to a series of nomadic travels, backpacking trips, and a slew of seasonal jobs, all of which helped*

*him uncover a love and passion for the natural world. In 2004 Jeff heard from a fellow nomad of a Master's program set on a traveling biodiesel school bus and promptly enrolled for the fall of '05. It was here that he met his future best friend, colleague, and wife, Paige. Today, "Jeff & Paige" have reached thousands of children with their joyful spirit of play and passion for ecological awareness through over 2,000 live shows and seven different albums.*

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

Yesterdog all the way! While all 3 of those hometown establishments have a place in my heart and tummy, Yesterdog takes the shredded pickle cake. After 49 years under the great Bill Lewis, my sister [Lisa (Kagan) Rapoport '93] and her fiancé [Pat Connor '91] are the new owners of the Dog. Surreal and magical to have this GR fixture (which comprises an estimated 12% of my body mass) in the family. I have been over to Eastown for at least one Veggie Dog (which my non-GR-native wife calls "a condiment bun") per day on my latest return home

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

MSU --> Americorps --> Nature nomad (month-long hikes on the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, Colorado Trail, 5 organic farms) --> teacher at Nature's Classroom, an environment education center in the Adirondacks --> field-based grad school on a biodiesel school bus where I met my wife and performance partner --> Boulder, CO, where we've been performing/creating nature- and science-based concerts and albums for kids for the past 21 years

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

The brilliance of community. My parents and sister have been and remain rooted in EGR for 5 decades. This family and this small city have given me a sense of place and a sense of belonging, a core value that Paige and I have sought to replicate a few states west of Michigan.

**What were you like in school?**

My folks got a call from Mr. Ogilvie (former EGRMS principal) after a band and orchestra concert in the early 90s. I was 2nd to last chair of the saxophones. Last chair (Jake Leech '97!) and I stood up during one of the songs and did an absurd, unsanctioned dance with our instruments mid-song. When my parents confronted me, I responded, "The concert needed some pizzazz. I'm the pizzazz." Took me a while to spin that whim into a career but, well, here we are :)

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

Mrs. Trout, my 1st and 3rd grade teacher at Wealthy!

**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?**

Performing "Cheeseburger in Paradise" with a live band of my classmates (including co-lead vocalist Carl Liggett '97) while wearing homemade burger costumes, my first-ever live performance onstage at the High School Variety Show in '96. I'd also have to say that my most signature East school experience would hands-down have to be performing two school assembly concerts at my old elementary school (Wealthy). In addition to the general joy of taking the stage at Pioneer Auditorium (first time since that Cheeseburger in Paradise performance ironically), I got to dress two of my elementary school teachers up in honeybee costumes and have them teach the Jeff & Paige version of the waggle dance to the current batch of Wealthy students. Very warm, beautiful experience.

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

Costume up for every social and/or significant experience. I wish I'd gone to Mr. Troost's world history final exam dressed as Genghis Khan...at the very least, I bet I would've gotten a few points of extra credit

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

Definitely. Some of my best friends remain EGR hometown heroes including two of my very closest friends in Colorado (Andy Gruel '98 and Kurt Mester '98)

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

Careers that don't yet exist are yours for the taking/making! Also, bike or rollerblade around Reeds Lake at least once/season.

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

Andy Gruel '98, this man is single-handedly keeping climate emissions down in Colorado through his work permitting corporations in our State (not to mention contributing piano and synth on all seven "Jeff & Paige" albums). Furthermore, he's intelligent, funny, and remembers more about his upbringing in EGR than anyone else I know!

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

Putting a door hanger in the backdoor to the EGRHS Little Auditorium and covertly sleeping over in the school, showering in the pool locker room and heading right to 1st period, one of the worst night's sleep of my 46 years.



**To see more Virtual Cup of Coffee alumni interviews, visit the [Alumni Profiles page](#) on our website.**





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

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