

# PIONEER POST

## East Grand Rapids Alumni Newsletter



### Homecoming and Upcoming Reunions

Once again this fall, the Foundation and Alumni Association will have an Alumni Tent at the home football game Friday, October 4. Stop by the tent from 7pm-8:30pm to meet up with your fellow Pioneers and spin our wheel to win some Foundation merch.

- **Homecoming** | October 4
- **Class of 1964** | August 23-24
- **Class of 1974** | September 14
- **Class of 1984** | October 19
- **Class of 1994** | October 18-19
- **Class of 1999** | October 5
- **Class of 2004** | September 28
- **Class of 2009** | TBD Thanksgiving week
- **Class of 2014** | November 30
- **Class of 2019** | November 27

Find more reunion information on our [Events and Class News pages](#). If your class year is not listed (1949, 1959, 1979, 1989) please contact us to let us know your reunion plans. The Foundation provides reunion planning support for all East classes. [Contact Maria Allen](#), Alumni Relations Coordinator, for more information.



### Class of '63 Donates "Buddy Bench"

Members of the EGRHS class of 1963 donated a "Buddy Bench" on the Wealthy Elementary School playground. The class of '63 was the last class to graduate from East Grand Rapids High School when it was in the building that is now Wealthy Elementary.

Pictured above are Jim Hakeem, Linda (Sarafis) Triant, and John Sebastian, representing the class of 1963. They placed a plaque by the bench that acknowledges their class's special connection to the site. A "Buddy Bench" is a place where kids will go to sit when they're looking for someone to play with them.

Thank you, class of '63! You're providing a lasting legacy of friendship!

PLEASE JOIN US  
FOR THE 14th COMMUNITY SERVICE  
AND DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI  
AWARDS DINNER

*Wednesday, October 16, 2024*

Watermark Country Club  
1600 Galbraith Ave SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Cocktail Hour 6:00 pm  
Dinner and Program 7:00 pm  
*Business Attire/Cash Bar*

HONORING

Community Service Award Recipients  
Leslie (Wiener) Hooker and  
Suzanne (Schuler) Wilcox  
Advocates for people with disabilities

Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient  
Bridget Brink, Class of 1987  
United States Ambassador to Ukraine

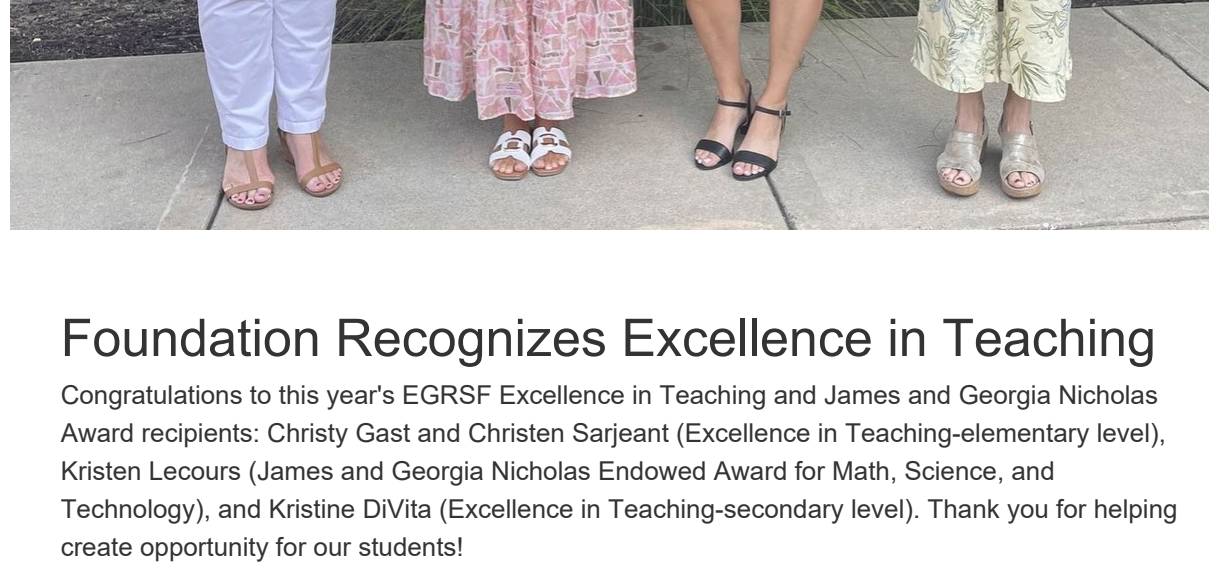
### U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink '87, Will Be Honored at October Awards Dinner, Along with Leslie Hooker and Suzanne Wilcox

The EGR Schools Foundation's [Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner](#) will be held on Wednesday, October 16, 2024.

This year's Distinguished Alumni honoree will be U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink, who graduated from East Grand Rapids High School in 1987.

This year's Community Service honorees will be Leslie (Wiener) Hooker and Suzanne (Schuler) Wilcox. Hooker and Wilcox are being honored for their years of work and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities. In 2018, Hooker and Wilcox founded Beer City Dog Biscuits, a West Michigan company whose core mission is empowering people with disabilities.

More details, including sponsorship opportunities and tickets, are available on the [Awards Dinner page](#) of our website!



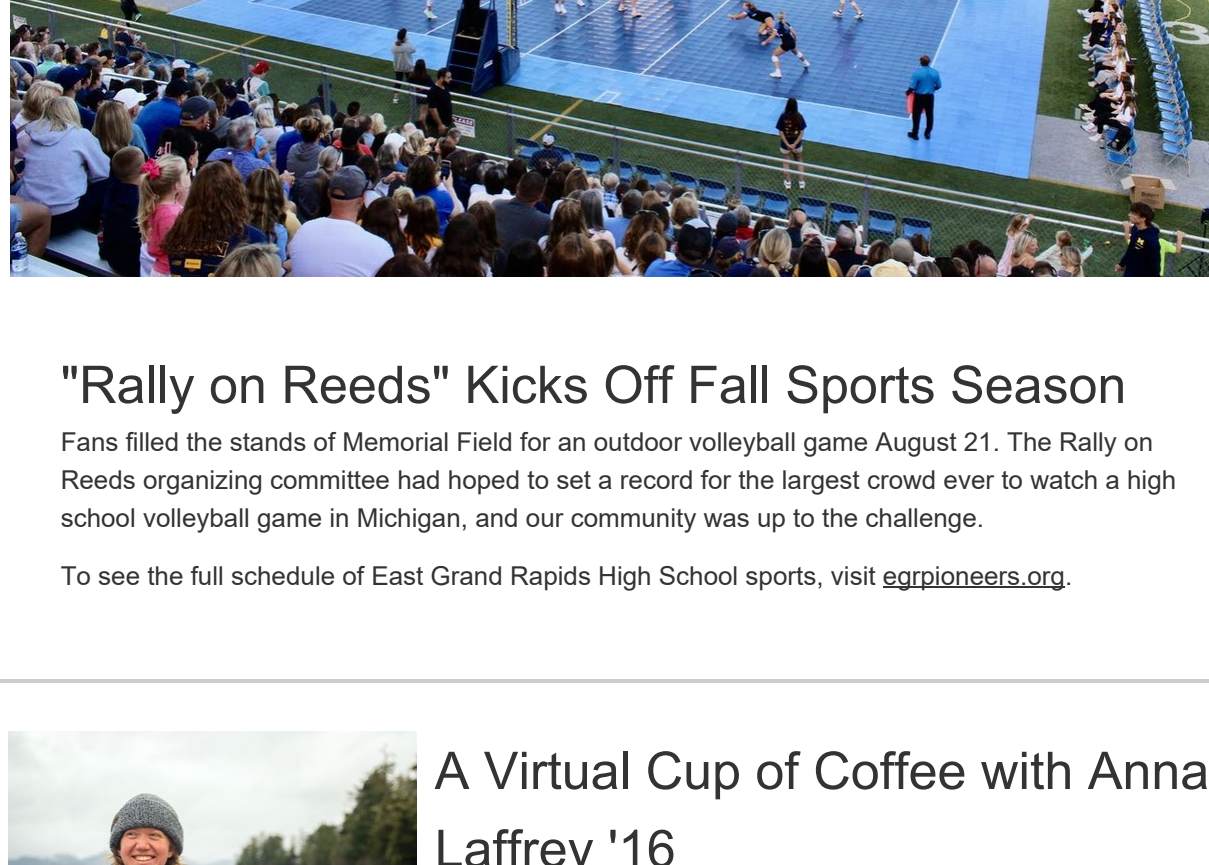
### Foundation Recognizes Excellence in Teaching

Congratulations to this year's EGRSF Excellence in Teaching and James and Georgia Nicholas Award recipients: Christy Gast and Christen Sarjeant (Excellence in Teaching-elementary level), Kristen Lecours (James and Georgia Nicholas Endowed Award for Math, Science, and Technology), and Kristine DiVita (Excellence in Teaching-secondary level). Thank you for helping create opportunity for our students!



### EGRPS Honors 2024 Retirees

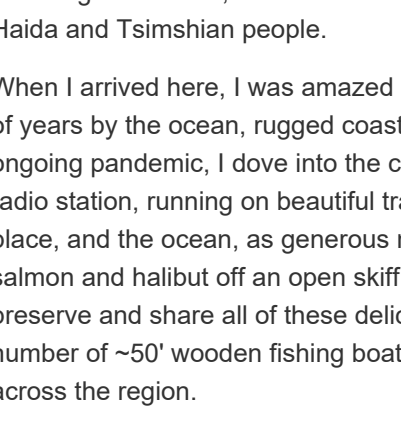
Last Spring at Rose's on Reeds Lake, the East Grand Rapids Public Schools honored faculty and staff members who retired at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. Pictured, from left to right, are Amy Marlow, Pam Steers, Jim Brechting, Scott Vanderploeg, Bonnie Noorman, Elizabeth Miller-Wallau, Karen Accola, and Dan Klumpp (not pictured Molly Buxton and Lisa Healy).



### "Rally on Reeds" Kicks Off Fall Sports Season

Fans filled the stands of Memorial Field for an outdoor volleyball game August 21. The Rally on Reeds organizing committee had hoped to set a record for the largest crowd ever to watch a high school volleyball game in Michigan, and our community was up to the challenge.

To see the full schedule of East Grand Rapids High School sports, visit [egrpioneers.org](#).



### A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Anna Laffrey '16

*After graduating from East Grand Rapids High School in 2016, Anna Laffrey attended the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. She now combines her love of journalism with her love of the ocean as a reporter for the Ketchikan Daily News and as a deckhand on fishing boats in southeast Alaska.*

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

Late-night Yesterdog with my brother William and any friends visiting town.

**What was your path from East Grand Rapids to where you are now in life?**  
After graduating from EGR, I went to journalism school at Northwestern University. I graduated from NU in March of 2020 in the early days of COVID-19. At the time, I felt burnt out by the undergraduate "career track" and had a bug in my ear about living in Sitka, Alaska someday.

With a fateful Google Jobs search, I found a part-time job with the Applied Fisheries program at the University of Alaska-Southeast campus in Sitka. I was fortunate to be hired for the job, convincing my parents to let me drive our family's SUV across the country, and board an Alaska State ferry heading from Bellingham, Washington to Sitka, which is situated in a temperate rainforest on the ancestral homelands of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people.

When I arrived here, I was amazed by the local history and cultures, which have been shaped for thousands of years by the ocean, rugged coastlines and tall mountains of the surrounding archipelagos. Despite the ongoing pandemic, I dove into the community by working on grassroots projects, volunteering at the local radio station, running on beautiful trails and meeting everybody that I could. I gradually fell in love with the place, and the ocean, as generous neighbors took me out on their boats, taught me how to harvest herring, salmon and halibut off an open skiff, how to gather berries, plants and mushrooms, and how to process, preserve and share all of these delicious wild foods. I've also been lucky to find jobs as a deckhand on a number of ~50 wooden fishing boats that target salmon and halibut in commercial, hook-and-line fisheries across the region.

In January of 2023, I moved to Ketchikan, another island community that's about 200 miles south of Sitka, to work as a reporter for the Ketchikan Daily News. KDN is one of the three remaining independent newspapers in Alaska that prints "daily" (we print five times per week). It's been fascinating to work in local news and learn about our governments, and the current issues that Southeast Alaska is facing. I plan to return to Sitka within the next year and hope to stay connected to local journalism while continuing to sharpen my skills as a fisherman/deckhand.

**What specific thing did you learn in East that has enabled you to be successful?**  
I learned the importance of being a good neighbor and being surrounded by a strong support network. Lessons about community from my friends in EGR have empowered me to build relationships and put down roots in new places.

**What were you like in school?**  
Talkative, stubborn and often bubbling over with energy. I loved being at school, working on extracurricular projects with friends, competing in running sports, and writing. I was ambitious and driven by goals of "career success" which, at the time, included "being a journalist in outer space."

**Did you have a favorite teacher or class?**  
I am not sure I had any "favorite" but know that I am much obliged to Katie Michell for all of her time and care as an educator, and for being a huge part of my experience at EGR. Mrs. Michell's kindness and concern for each student at EGRHS contributed to a positive, dynamic and challenging environment every day. In both her English and journalism classes, she gave me incredible support and latitude to pursue journalism as a life path.

**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?**  
Grilling hot dogs and hamburgers with Zoe Macartney for our entire class as the two designated "grill masters" for an end-of-year cookout in the "senior parking lot." I remember being delighted by the responsibility of grilling for our class, and having a wonderful time visiting with all of the people who we were graduating with, many of whom I had known since kindergarten or first grade.

**What do you know now that you wish you'd known then?**  
(In light of the previous and the next question) I wish I knew that I wouldn't always be near or connected to the people that I'd grown up with, and that I should make the most of every opportunity to get to know the people who supported me throughout my childhood.

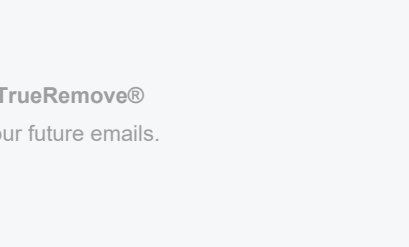
**Do you stay in touch with many people from East Grand Rapids?**  
I keep in touch with a few of my lifetime neighborhood friends, and my best girlfriends from high school. Thanks to my parents, I still feel connected to a strong network of neighbors and "family friends" from EGR. I'm also grateful to the Coles, who recently moved home to Beaver Island, for supporting me and hosting me in their small island community since Mackenzie and I graduated from EGR in 2016.

**What advice do you have for young East alums who are just starting out?**  
You can be yourself, follow your passion and serve your community in practically any setting. Follow your gut and you will find your own version of success. And at the end of the day, happiness and good relationships = success!

**Who else would you like us to have a virtual cup of coffee with?**  
I would love to hear from Max Condon '16 who is doing excellent work in fashion and design and Georgia Deems '16 who has been serving with the U.S. Marine Corps.

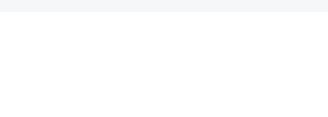
**Bonus question: What are you glad we didn't ask you about?**  
The "EGR bucket list" items that my friends and I made sure to complete before getting through that driving a Jeep through the forested footpath beneath "the rock" — yes, a Jeep actually does fit through that path.

**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, [egr.org](#)

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