

# THE PIONEER POST

East Grand Rapids Alumni Newsletter

Autumn 2018



## A Bold, Innovative Way East Alumni Can Give Back

This month, the EGR Schools Foundation is introducing Now&Forever, a brilliant new way you can help our students, our schools, and our community. Now&Forever is a permanent, stable, sustainable solution to funding enhancements and program support in our schools.

As an East alum, you know our schools are a constant source of pride, but unpredictable school funding has threatened our tradition of excellence. Every year, programs are in jeopardy, and have been saved only by the hundreds of families who have donated to the Foundation's annual EGRNOW! Campaign.

"With the help of everyone in the East community--alumni, parents, families and community members--our goal is to grow our endowment to the point where the investment earnings will fund the programs and enhancements that will keep our schools among the very best in Michigan," says Foundation Executive Director Amy Stuursma.

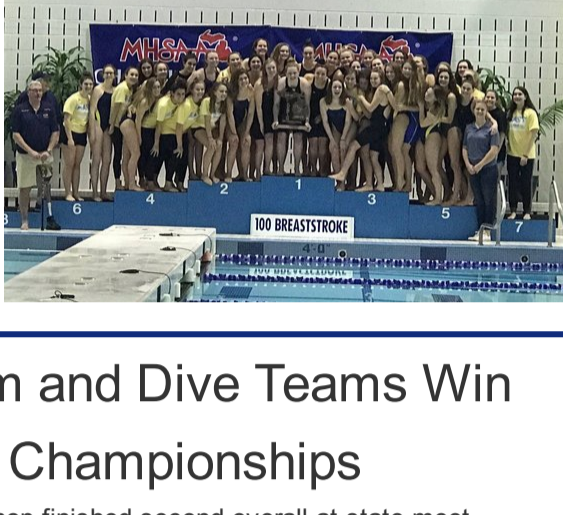
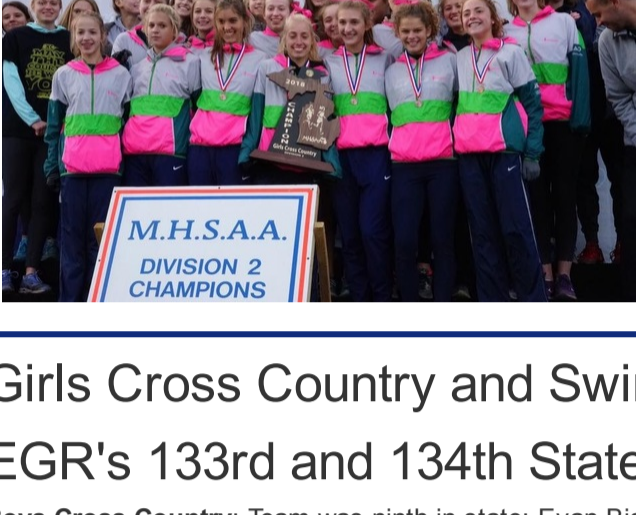
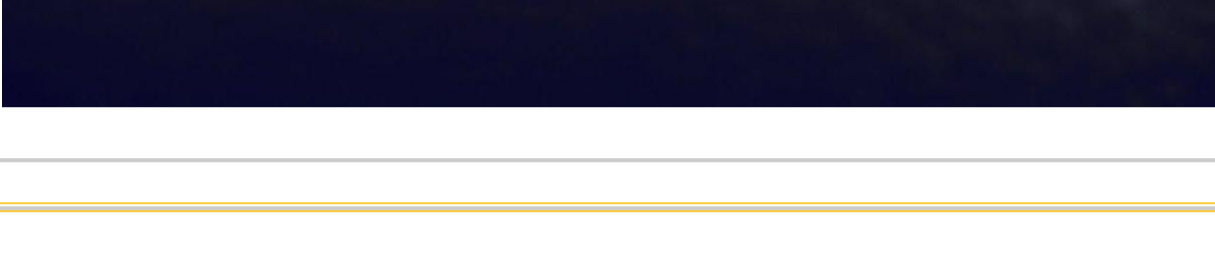
"The people who started our Foundation thirty-five years ago were pioneers," Stuursma continues. "We were one of the first in Michigan dedicated to a public school district. Now it's our turn to lead the way, as pioneers, and make this historic change in the way we're able to support our students and our schools."

Campaign materials are being shared this month, and an introductory video is available below. "It's very exciting to finally be able to share with our alumni this blueprint for how the Foundation will support programs and enhancements in our schools in the future," Stuursma says. "In the last 35 years, the Foundation has provided more than \$4 million to our schools for this purpose. We're reaching out to all our alumni, asking for a three-year pledge to the endowment by the end of the year. We want to ensure that the East tradition of excellence that has served our alumni so well is preserved for generations to come."

Now&Forever is a bold, innovative, smart solution. "We're not building a new auditorium or a cafeteria or a stadium," Stuursma says. "We're building the future of our schools. And we need our alumni to be part of it."

**Foundation Connection: Thanks to our generous donors, the Foundation has provided more than \$4,000,000 in enhancements and program support to our schools since its inception in 1983.**

[Donate to Now&Forever](#)



## Girls Cross Country and Swim and Dive Teams Win EGR's 133rd and 134th State Championships

- Boys Cross Country:** Team was ninth in state; Evan Bishop finished second overall at state meet.
- Boys Soccer:** Won first two rounds of playoffs, vs. Forest Hills Eastern and Greenville.
- Boys Tennis:** Team finished third in state; first doubles team of Ryan Post and Kole Butterer won state championship.
- Boys Water Polo:** Finished third in District 2 of West Region.
- Crew:** Competed with (and sometimes defeated) some of the top programs in the midwest.
- Field Hockey:** Scored goal on last play of state playoff game vs. Dexter.
- Football:** O-K Gold co-champions, lost to Muskegon 42-35 in first round of state playoffs.
- Girls Cross Country:** Won Division 2 state championship with 5 girls in top 15.
- Girls Golf:** Abby Bell qualified for state championships.
- Girls Swim and Dive:** Won Division 3 state championship.
- Sailing:** Finished third in state at State of Michigan Championship Regatta.
- Volleyball:** First home outdoor Hearts of Gold game helped raise more than \$80,000 for Children's Advocacy Center.

**Foundation Connection: The Gerken Open, the June golf outing organized by the EGR Schools Foundation and the Team Boosters, supports East Grand Rapids athletics, Kabookie Week, and the Jimmy Gerken Fund, supporting athletics and co-curriculars.**



## Macbeth, Harmony for Humanity Concert Highlight Fall Shows

The East Drama and Music programs offered a full slate of shows at the Performing Arts Center this fall.

Highlights included the annual Harmony for Humanity orchestra concert and the high school fall play, Macbeth. The Harmony for Humanity concert honors Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter murdered in 2002.

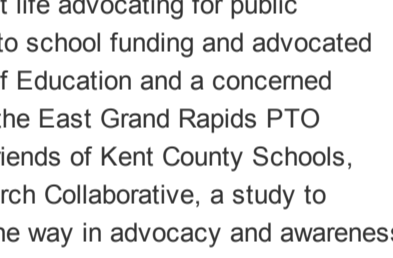
The fall schedule also featured 24-Hour Theater, performances by the middle school and high school bands and orchestras, and the Autumn Choral Concert. Middle school performers and the Madrigals also added their talents to the Foundation's Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner (details below).

**Foundation Connection: The EGR Schools Foundation funds vital school programs, including the management of the Performing Arts Center.**

## Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner Was Fun and Inspiring

The EGR Schools Foundation held the 11th Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner November 1 at Thousand Oaks Golf Club.

The Community Service Award honors someone who has significantly contributed their leadership and spirit to the community of East Grand Rapids. The recipient doesn't need to be an East Grand Rapids alum.

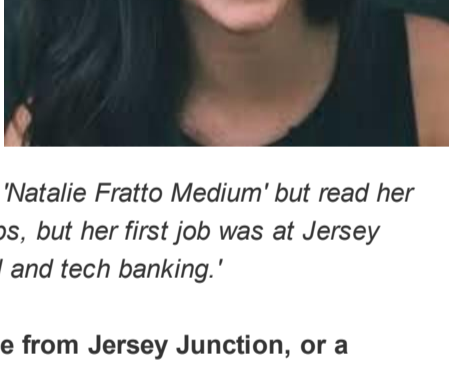


Elizabeth Welch, '88, was this year's recipient of the Community Service Award. Welch has spent most of her adult life advocating for public education. An attorney by trade, she has fought against cuts to school funding and advocated for our students and schools as both a Trustee of the Board of Education and a concerned parent. Welch started her work as a parent representative on the East Grand Rapids PTO Legislative Committee. Her work then expanded to include Friends of Kent County Schools, Michigan Parents for Schools, and the School Finance Research Collaborative, a study to determine the true cost of educating a child. Welch has led the way in advocacy and awareness for public education in Kent County and in Michigan, and she is well known throughout the state for her depth of knowledge in school funding and her advocacy efforts.

Quantum chemist Henry "Fritz" Schaefer, '62, was this year's Distinguished Alumni Award winner. The award honors East Grand Rapids alumni who have distinguished themselves through personal and/or professional achievements. Dr. Schaefer is the Graham Perdue Professor of Chemistry and Director of the Center for Computational Chemistry at the University of Georgia, as well as Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus, at the University of California at Berkeley. Dr. Schaefer received his B.S. in chemical physics from MIT and his Ph.D. from Stanford. He is married to the former Karen Rasmussen, '63. For more than 30 years, he has been one of the most highly cited scientists in the world. He is the author of more than 1,500 scientific publications, and he's also been listed by The Best Schools as one of "Seven Chemists who Deserve a Nobel Prize."

**Foundation Connection: The morning after the awards dinner, Dr. Schaefer spoke to a capacity crowd of students in the Little Aud at the high school.**

## A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Natalie Fratto '08



Every so often, we get to sit down and have a virtual cup of coffee with an East alum who's doing something really exciting. Recently, we sat down with Natalie Fratto. Want to join us? Pull up a chair!

*You know how you secretly want someone to explain Bitcoin and the blockchain and quantum computing to you in a way that makes sense to grown-up humans? Natalie Fratto '08 could do it. In fact, she did, in an article that appeared in Fortune and on Medium. (You can find that and more of her writing just by googling 'Natalie Fratto Medium' but read her profile first.) She's worked in management consulting and for startups, but her first job was at Jersey Junction. Now, she works in what she calls 'a mix of venture capital and tech banking.'*

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

I hope this doesn't sound blasphemous, but I don't really remember Rose's caramel corn at all. I'd love a couple ultradogs right now, but I'd have to opt for Jersey Junction because working there was my very first job. At 16, I spent the spring and summer scooping cones, and I'd walk over after school, usually with a few friends in tow. They'd eat ice cream, then loiter on the front porch for a few hours until I was done making hundreds of waffle cones in back. I swear I smelled like waffle cones for that entire summer.

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

I think everyone's path is a little random, if we're being honest. I went to Michigan because I loved the idea of a Big Ten school, but also because about 40 of my classmates were going there too. My junior summer at U-M, I interned for a teeny two-person startup in LA where I caught the startup bug. I loved that experience, but the startup got bought by a bigger, very boring company only 9 months later, so I didn't want to go back and work there after graduating. The two guys I had worked for there coincidentally both had backgrounds in management consulting. I loved the way that they thought and worked through problems, so, on their advice, I got my first job after school in management consulting.

I moved to Chicago and traveled basically every week. For the first year, I was working on a merger in the semiconductor industry in San Francisco, so I would fly from O'Hare to SFO every single Monday and back every Thursday night. The work was fun and stimulating, but eventually I got sick of the 6-hour-plus commutes and left consulting after three years to hop back into startups.

I was very lucky that the next teeny startup I chose to work with was accepted into Y Combinator, a sort of mini-MBA for startups, so I had a lot of mentorship from other people who had done something similar before. Eventually the startup failed, but the experience of building something from the ground up was really challenging and rewarding.

Now I'm working on the other side of the table from early stage startups in a role that is a mix of venture capital and tech banking. I live in NYC and spend a lot of time in San Francisco. For the time being, I think NYC will be home for a long time to come, but who knows what the future holds!

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

I really took the "tradition of excellence" motto to heart. In East, there is a feeling that everyone around you is capable of achieving anything, and the community - from teachers to parents to coaches - is very invested in creating a culture where students feel empowered to do big things. When I got to college, it was already very instilled in me that I absolutely could do anything I wanted, because everyone at home believed in us.

**What were you like in school?**

I was very into high school - hyper-involved, and tried to get exposed to all kinds of groups and experiences. I was Class President and Captain of the field hockey team and on the We The People constitutional debate team. It was important to me to get good grades, but probably even more important to keep a balance of going out with friends, playing sports (I was never very good) and experimenting with other extracurricular activities. I liked to be busy!

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

Definitely We The People with Janice Yates. I actually don't remember if it was a class, or purely after-school but Mrs. Yates (who also taught AP World & US History and Government) is one of those teachers that I think everyone remembers fondly if they took a class with her. She pushed you hard and the classes were difficult, but I bet more than half of the students who were in We The People went on to study political science or law or government. It was path-altering to be in a program like Weeple (as we affectionately called it) because it was rigorous but also gave us exposure to state senators, lawyers and other government officials. I'll never forget winning State Championships and our trip to DC for the National Championships. We placed 6th in the nation that year - very much because of her guidance.

**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?**

I gave our high school commencement speech, which was a really cool moment, but honestly the things I remember most are Friday night football games. It was so much fun to get dressed up for spirit themes and cheer for the football team with all of my friends. Cheering for East's football team definitely prepped me to be a good Michigan football fan (...or tailgater at least). I tell people all the time still that, "American Pie is based on my high school." It's the most quintessential American high school experience, and I'm really grateful for that.

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

I wish that I recognized then how lucky I was to be able to try out basically anything I wanted at East. In high school, you're in a mode of constant experimentation - a new sport, the school play, a hard class, a new team, etc. Now, because so much of what I do is work, I have to go out of my way to try new things, but back then, everything was on the table to taste.

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

Yes! In fact, a few of us from my 2008 class are in the midst of planning our 10-year reunion right now for this fall. Funny story - since I was Class President and Max Mikelic was Student Body President, neither of us can remember who is supposed to be on the hook for planning class reunions, so we're both just doing it together since we both live in New York now (with the help of a few GR-based classmates!).

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

Go for it. Whatever "it" is, go all in. You're more capable than you realize and you have an incredible support system at home.

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

Joe Carroll! He's still one of my very close friends in New York and also a sign of 2008. We went to Michigan together and I've been so impressed by his career since then. He's been in 3 Broadway shows so far, and I think this is just the start. In high school, we would tease him with "I'll come see you on Broadway someday" and now look at him! I went to see him play drums with his band in a big New York venue a few weeks ago. Talk about making dreams come true.

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

That one time that I took a theater class as a blowoff course...then forgot all my lines during dress rehearsal, said a swear word loudly, then walked offstage immediately. Perhaps that's why I never mustered the courage to try out for a real school play.

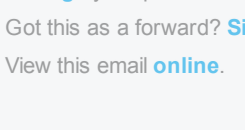
For more "Virtual Cup of Coffee with..." visit the [Alumni Profiles](#) page on our web site.

**Foundation Connection: Every year, the Foundation supports graduates for East classes from the last 70 years. If you'd like to organize one of your own, or to learn about other ways to connect with your classmates, you can email Alumni Relations Coordinator [Maria Allen](#).**



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