

PIONEER POST

East Grand Rapids Alumni Newsletter

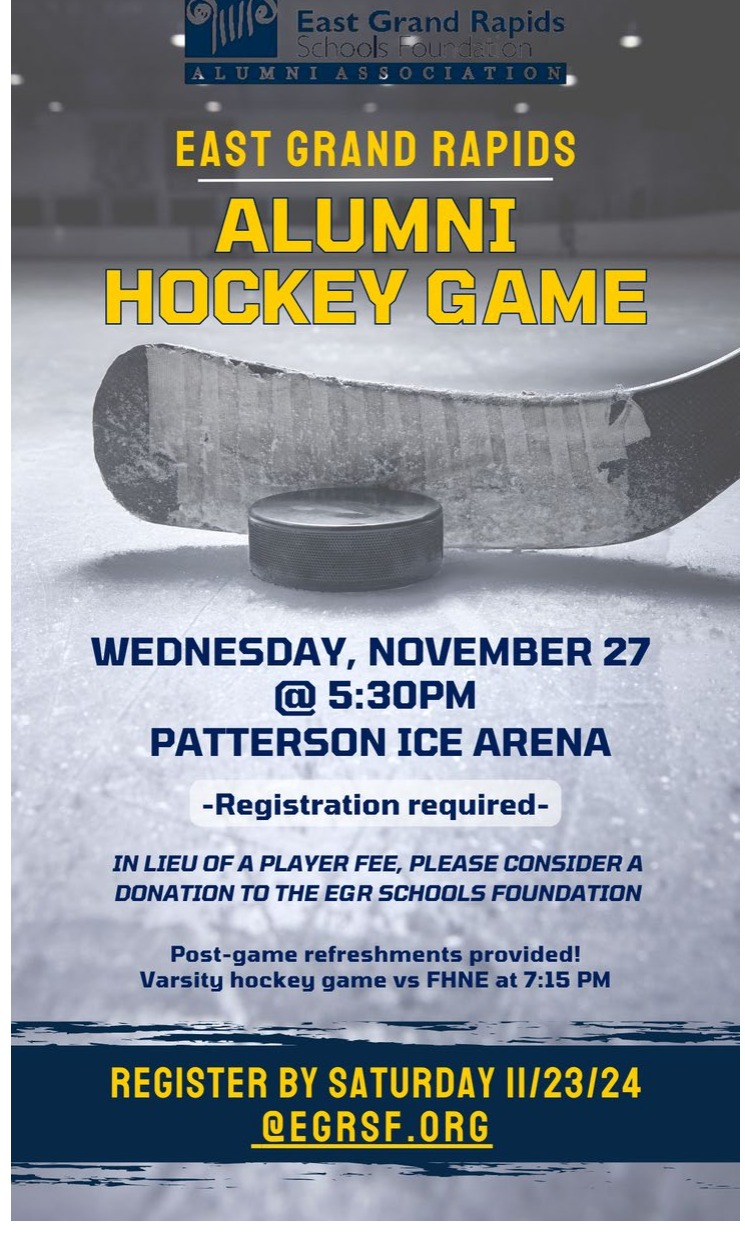


The classes of 1964, 1974, 1984, 1994, 1999, and 2004 celebrated their class reunions this fall.

Upcoming Reunions and Alumni Hockey Game

It's been a busy fall with reunions and Homecoming, but there are still two reunions and the Alumni Hockey Game next week:

- **Alumni Hockey Game** Wednesday, November 27, at 5:30 pm at Patterson Ice Center
- **Class of 2019** Wednesday, November 27, at 7 pm Midtown at Studio Park
- **Class of 2014** Saturday, November 30, at 8 pm at Founders Brewing Co.



Fall Sports Highlights: Girls Swim and Dive Wins

East's Record 152nd State Championship!

- **Boys Soccer:** Reached the district final before losing to Forest Hills Northern.
- **Boys Cross Country:** Finished third at state championships.
- **Boys Tennis:** Tied for seventh at state championships.
- **Boys Water Polo:** Had victories against both Hudsonville and Rockford, perennially two of the best teams in the state.
- **Crew:** Hosted the Battle of the Beltline for the first time, defeating Forest Hills Central in a memorable competition to retain the Belt (shown below).
- **Field Hockey:** Won conference and reached state quarter-finals.
- **Football:** Defeated both Grand Rapids Christian and Grand Rapids Catholic Central and qualified for playoffs.
- **Girls Cross Country:** Finished seventh at state championships.
- **Girls Golf:** Record number of new participants with 19 freshmen. Fern Babinski was selected through the First Tee of West Michigan to play in the PURE Insurance Championship at Pebble Beach.
- **Girls Swimming:** Won East Grand Rapids' 152nd state title by 234 points, extending the school's state record for most championships in all sports in state history.
- **Girls Volleyball:** The "Rally on Reeds" game on Memorial Field was one of the best-attended girls sports events in school history.
- **Sailing:** Finished in the Top 10 at the Team and Individual State Championships.

To see the full schedule of East Grand Rapids High School sports, visit egrpioneers.org.

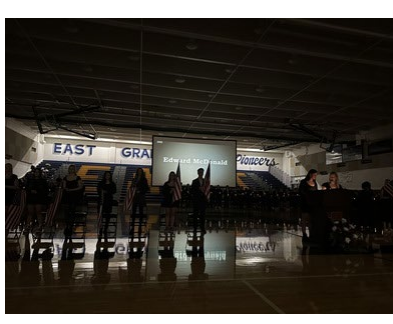


Foundation Funding Big Year for Performing Arts

Tonight at 7 is the last performance of the high school play, "Treasure Island," in the Performing Arts Center.

This is a transformational year for the performing arts in all our schools. In response to a request from the district, the Foundation is providing nearly \$100,000 this school year to support a new drama director and performances in all our schools, including the Middle School Musical, "Cinderella," which also has its final performance, tonight at 7 in the Pioneer Auditorium at Wealthy Elementary.

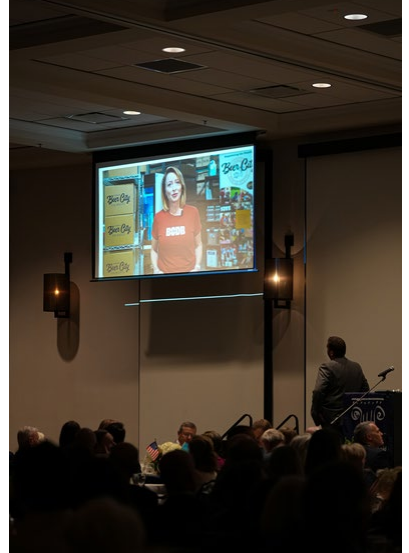
Thank you, Foundation donors, for providing this opportunity for all our students to participate in these productions!



EGRSF Funds Veterans Day Assembly Speaker

On November 11, the traditional Veterans Day assembly at the high school was as moving as ever. Thanks to a grant from the Foundation, former U.S. Army Captain and FBI agent Sarah Draper spoke to our students. Thank you, donors, for making that opportunity possible.

Want more examples of the opportunity we provide together? Watch this video from our most recent "Big Check Day" when we presented 38 giant checks covering 21 classroom enhancement grants:



U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink '87, Beer City Dog Biscuits Founders Leslie Hooker '83 and Suzanne Wilcox '80 Honored at Awards Dinner

On Wednesday, October 16, 2024, the EGR Schools Foundation's Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner was held at Watermark Country Club.

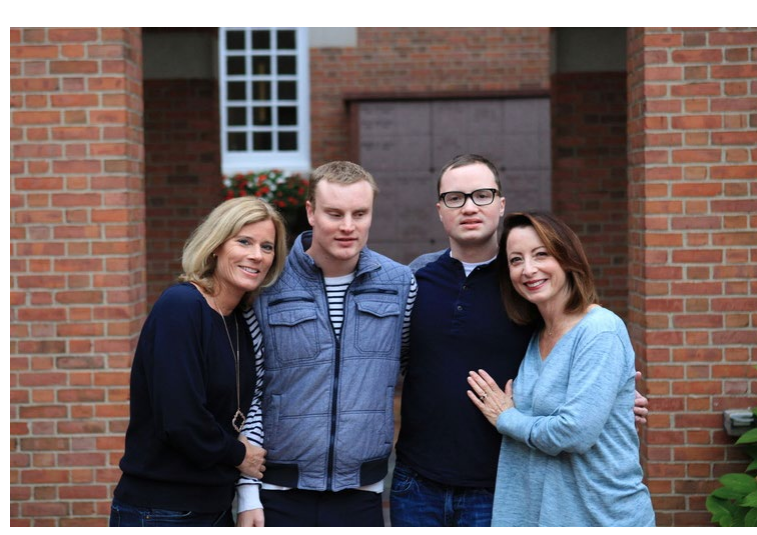
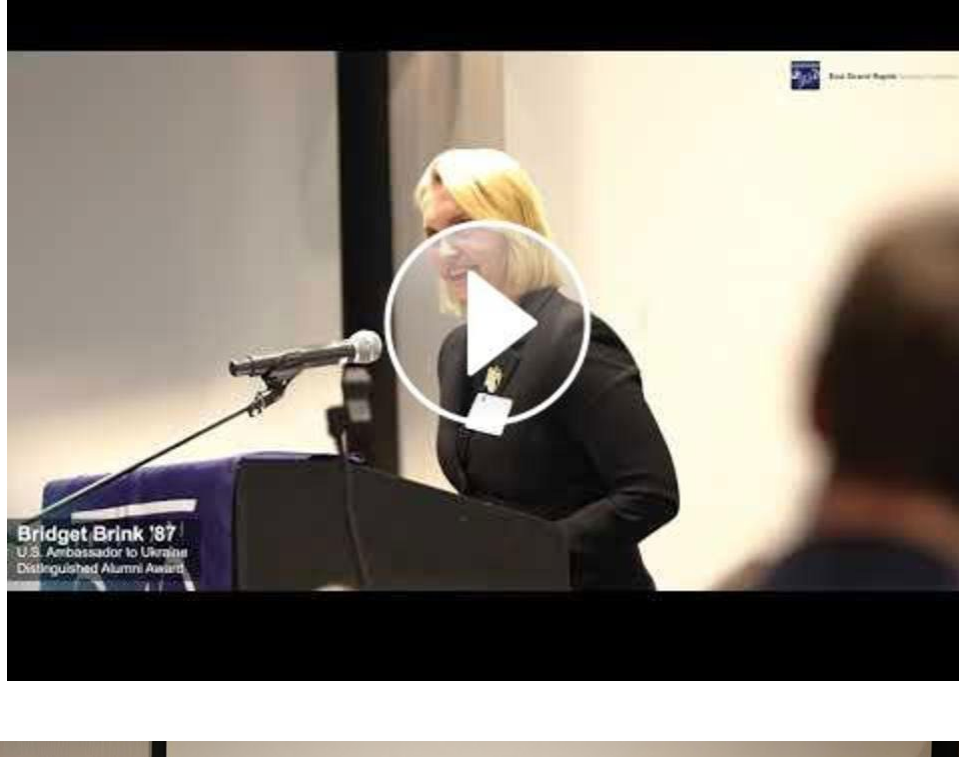
This year's Distinguished Alumni honoree was U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink, who graduated from East Grand Rapids High School in 1987.

This year's Community Service honorees were Leslie (Wiener) Hooker '83 and Suzanne (Schuler) Wilcox '80.

Hooker and Wilcox were 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.

This year's [Excellence in Teaching Award](#) recipients (shown in photo below) were also honored at the awards dinner, which was one of the most powerful programs we've ever held. The enthusiasm and appreciation from the more than 300 attendees was palpable throughout the presentation, and culminated with a standing ovation at the end of the night.

Here's a highlight video from the event:



A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Leslie Hooker '83 and Suzanne Wilcox '80

Leslie (Wiener) Hooker and Suzanne (Schuler) Wilcox were honored with this year's EGRSF Community Service Award. For years, Hooker and Wilcox have been advocating on behalf of people with disabilities. In 2018, they

founded Beer City Dog Biscuits.

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

LESLIE: That's really hard...so many memories from each place. Rose's caramel corn reminds me of my childhood in East, ice cream at Jersey is a place we took our kids weekly when they were young, and Yesterdog is a place I frequented late night on holiday breaks through college and post college.

SUZANNE: In High School I would say Yesterdog, especially at 2a.m. on a weekend night. But now my tastes have matured, haha, and I say Rose's without question!

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

LESLIE: I left home and went to college at the University of Wyoming. I loved the west so after graduating I moved with 3 girlfriends from UW to Denver. After a few years in Denver, I missed family, friends and water, so I moved back to EGR. I met my husband, David Hooker (alum of EGR), and we married and bought a home in EGR. We have three children: Tanis, Lauren and Charlotte. Lucky me, they all live in GR! Lauren married a year ago and she and her husband, Rhett, just bought a home in EGR! I worked in marketing and project management, but once my third child, Charlotte, came along I stayed home and put my energies into my kids, volunteering in the EGR schools and local non profits. But I always had a side hustle. I prefer to stay busy. In 2018, Suzanne and I started a non profit, Beer City Dog Biscuits.

SUZANNE: Soon after attending University of Wisconsin-Madison, I married Tad Wilcox '78. His job took us from Niles, Michigan to Petoskey, Michigan, where I worked as a real estate broker and where we had our four children: Jake, Mac, Hannah, and Gavin. From Petoskey, we moved to Chagrin Falls, Ohio. While living there I saw a need to support families that had children with disabilities. They needed someone who knew their struggles to stand in the gap and bridge communication between schools and families. In 1998, I started an educational consulting business to advocate for those families. When we were asked to move again, we packed up the kids and moved to Columbus, Ohio, and I opened a branch of my consulting business with two employees. In 2010, we moved back to East Grand Rapids and opened a third office of my business. With my older sons living in Chicago and Hannah (Gavin's twin), off to college in Boston, I began to think about the next step for our autistic son, Gavin. So, I closed my consulting business and with the support of a great friend, Leslie, we started a nonprofit for individuals with developmental disabilities, Beer City Dog Biscuits.

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

LESLIE: It is a very competitive and giving community and these attributes have always been top of mind. My parents and their friends always modeled hard work, giving back to our community, and acceptance of all.

SUZANNE: The overall quality of our schools was top notch. It gave me a well-rounded education and exposed me to things and experiences I would never have had somewhere else.

What were you like in school?

LESLIE: Hmm, that's hard to know, but I hope kind. I had friends in lots of different groups – classes, athletic teams, neighborhood friends. I was very social, athletic, but probably should have put more time into my classes!

SUZANNE: I think you should ask my peers this first. Outgoing, chatty (sometimes too much). I was involved in a lot of different things: sports, student council, cheerleading, danced in the musical and water ballet, to name a few. I had a core group of close friends but had a wide circle of friends from different social groups and grades.

Did you have a favorite teacher or class?

LESLIE: Yes, Sheila Pantlind. She liked to say, "Life is difficult and life is not fair." This was a great reminder to work hard and when you change your attitude, you change your future.

SUZANNE: I had a few that really made an impression on me such as Sheila Pantlind, Jerry Norman, Mr. Wisz, and Major Bly. But the one teacher that was my favorite was Coach Barcheski. He treated me and his students as adults. He never talked down to us and he made you feel like your opinion mattered. While his classes were on the easier side, he made it so fun, and I always looked forward to going to it. He really helped me understand Jimmy Gerken. He said, "Schuls, he's just like you. All he wants to do is be included." I'll never forget it. Mrs. Graham also had an influence on me. She made Shakespeare come alive.

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?

LESLIE: I had lots of favorite memories from growing up in EGR. I think my best memories are from high school sports. The bond of hard work, teamwork and fun have always stayed with me.

SUZANNE: I had a wonderful time in high school and find myself fortunate to have had such a great experience. I know that is rare. I would have to say one thing that sticks out is my senior year, I was one of three directors for the water ballet performance. Mrs. Graham was our coach. We had to choreograph about eighty girls for an opening and closing number. That was my first experience in leading people. With Mrs. Graham's guidance, I learned so much, tools that I rely on today.

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

LESLIE: I'm surrounded every day by awesome individuals with developmental disabilities who have really figured out this world. I wish I had taken the time to know more of these individuals earlier in my life, because they are the best of humanity. See all the good in all people and break some barriers!

SUZANNE: It's alright to fail. No one is perfect, and most people fail before they succeed. The tragedy is not learning from your mistakes.

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

LESLIE: Yes, my business partner, Suzanne. Most of my best friends from high school live in other states, but we do try to stay in touch through social media and phone calls. Our reunion this past summer was really fun

and I reconnected with lots of my classmates.

SUZANNE: Yes, of course, my business partner, Leslie. I also keep in close contact with my high school besties. We get together once a year!

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

LESLIE: Be yourself and don't be afraid to try new things. For me setting faith and hard work into my daily life and work life have helped me prioritize what is important.

SUZANNE: Don't worry about what others are doing and if you are missing out. You're not!!! You can't shortcut hard work. Success doesn't come without hard work and that includes a loving family.

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

LESLIE: I would have to go with my best friends from high school!

SUZANNE: Hmmm, that is a hard one. Sorry, I'm no help.

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

LESLIE: Our childhood car that my brothers and sister and I shared!

SUZANNE: What we did during senior week before graduation.

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, egrfsf.org

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