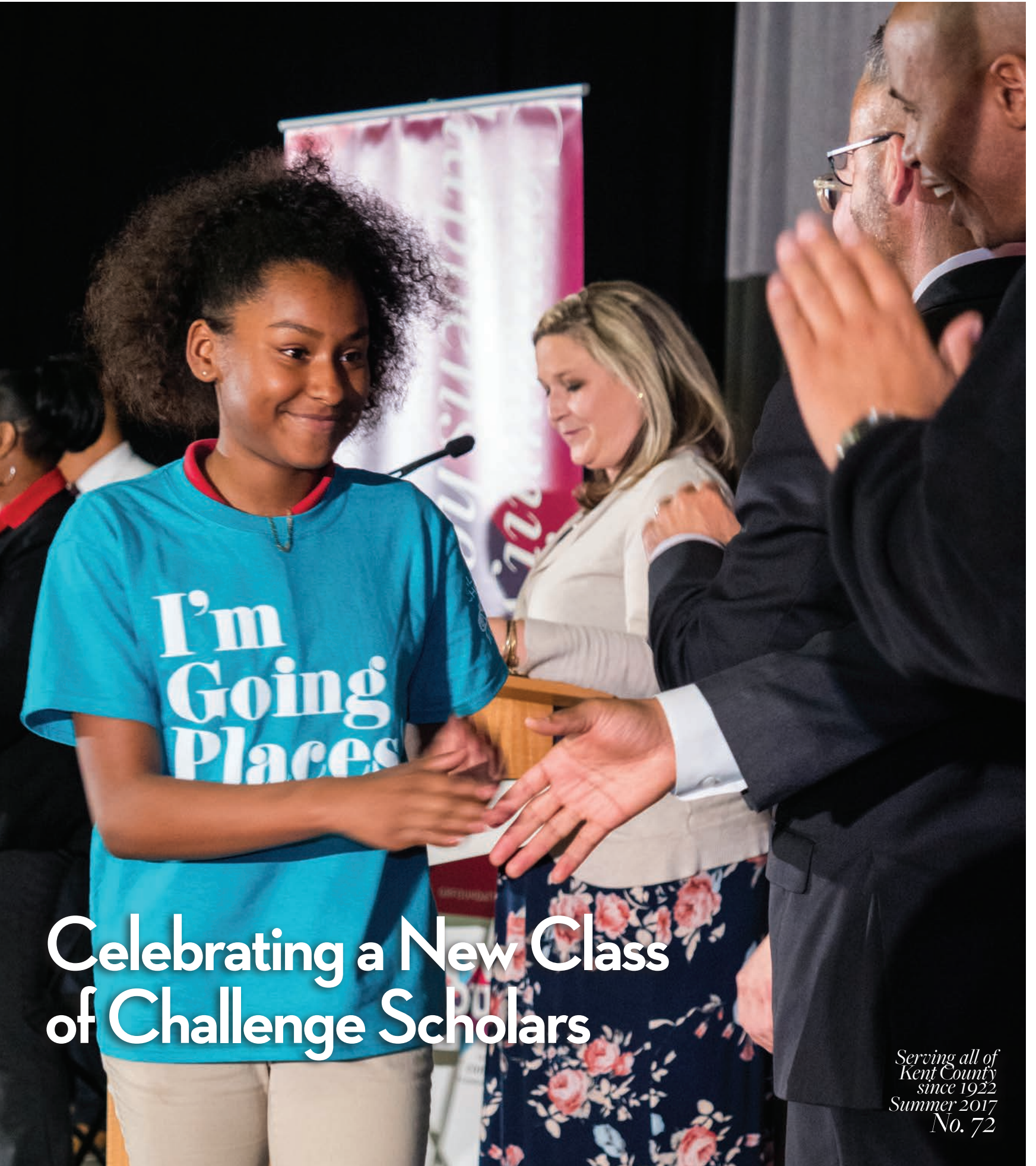


# CURRENT



## Celebrating a New Class of Challenge Scholars

*Serving all of  
Kent County  
since 1922  
Summer 2017  
No. 72*

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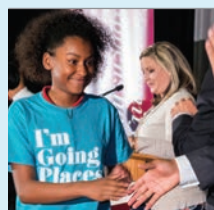


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**About the Cover**  
 Crossing the stage at our induction ceremony, Harrison Park School student A'mariana Darby Jackson gives a high five to principal Troy Wilbon.



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# An Abundance of New Grants



## THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AT GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION RECENTLY APPROVED THE FOLLOWING GRANTS TOTALING \$1,402,500.

### **Children's Assessment Center: \$100,000**

**Purpose:** To increase the space and capacity at Children's Assessment Center (CAC). CAC provides comprehensive services to suspected victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. It coordinates with Children's Protective Services, law enforcement, family advocates, the prosecutor's office, medical experts and mental health clinicians. Rather than going through repeated interviews and examinations at different locations, children have a single interview and examination in one place. In the same place, they receive services to reduce trauma and begin the healing process. This grant will help CAC expand services to victims of sex trafficking and those with cognitive or developmental disabilities.

**Why it matters:** In Kent County 6,000 to 8,000 kids are sexually abused each year, and, of those cases, about 1,000 are reported. With increased space and staffing, CAC will be able to serve nearly all cases reported in the county.



### **Community Rebuilders: \$250,000**

**Purpose:** To create a wellness program for veterans, based on two national models—Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds of Allen Force and Mindful Resilience by Veterans Yoga Project. Both programs were designed to address the specific mental and physical disorders often experienced by veterans returning to civilian life. The primary focus of programming is trauma recovery—recognizing how PTSD affects veterans. This grant was made possible by The Cecilia Hoagland Fund for Local Veterans.

**Why it matters:** Local veterans have repeatedly asked for non-traditional wellness programs that specifically meet their needs. Community Rebuilders has successfully worked in the veterans community on housing issues.

### **Grand Rapids Urban League: \$150,000**

**Purpose:** To support the Community Diversion program. It works to keep families in housing with simple, needs-based supports and stabilizes families on the brink of homelessness. This eliminates their need for emergency shelter services. The Urban League is the fiduciary for multiple organizations participating in the program.

**Why it matters:** The Community Diversion Program provides financial assistance to families for things like food, transportation, utilities, rent, housing application and deposit fees. Funds from this grant will also support the program's initial setup and case management. The program's goal is to eliminate simple expenses that can quickly add up, forcing a family to move from safe housing to an emergency shelter.

### **Grand Rapids Public Schools: \$500,000**

**Purpose:** To improve academic outcomes through professional development and teacher coaching. This marks the seventh year of grant funds for Challenge Scholars. Funds will also help create a college-going culture at Harrison Park, Westwood Middle and Union High Schools. Full-time coordinators at each building work with students, parents and school staff to increase awareness of post-secondary possibilities.

**Why it matters:** With support from the Community Foundation, GRPS is working to insure students are academically prepared and exposed to college and career opportunities. We also provide additional grants to Kent

School Services Network to support attendance and to WestSide Collaborative to support community engagement. Students who meet GPA and attendance requirements receive a scholarship for college or a trade education.

### **Senior Neighbors: \$382,500**

**Purpose:** To support the Foster Grandparents/Traveling Grannies and Grandpas program at Harrison Park, Sibley and Stocking Elementary Schools. Volunteers are paired with students who need a mentor or a tutor. Each older adult works with eight students, meeting three times per week to work on specific goals. Mentors are recruited from the neighborhood where the schools are located and undergo extensive training for the program. This program replicates a national model.

**Why it matters:** Historically, this intergenerational program has proved to increase academic success for 85 percent of mentored students. Volunteering also profoundly increases mentors' reported physical activity, social engagement and well-being.

### **The SOURCE: \$20,000**

**Purpose:** To provide boot camp tech training for employees to learn new skills, especially software development. Many people in the program work at low-wage jobs. The part-time 14-week program will allow people with full-time jobs to participate. Grand Circus is the training firm partnering with The SOURCE for this tech boot camp.

**Why it matters:** The program helps employees seek better-paying jobs with new skills. It helps local employers find and retain workers in in-demand fields.



## Dr. Eric Graf and Dr. Theresa Osmer

*“Through giving, we are able to be investors into our community. To see our city grow and flourish is the best reward.”*

**D**r. Theresa Osmer and Dr. Eric Graf are chiropractors with distinctly different practices. She owns FLOW Chiropractic, located within Renew Mama Studio, and specializes in working with prenatal, postpartum and pediatric clients. He’s a partner at Train Out Pain, a sports medicine practice. So, it’s no surprise that they focus their philanthropy on wellness, the environment and helping people maintain an active lifestyle.

Eric’s passion is cycling, and he rides for the Grand Rapids Bicycle Company team on gravel roads, single-track trails or the beach in the winter to get his two-wheeled fix. Theresa enjoys biking, weightlifting at CrossFit 616 and running.

“Sustainability and environmental preservation are so important to us. From fresh food access to enjoying the great outdoors, our environment matters and requires that we start becoming more mindful to how we treat it. We support local initiatives to help promote and implement these ideals,” Theresa said.

“The local chapter of the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the West Michigan Mountain Bicycling Alliance, does an incredible job for trail advocacy and is constantly working to make the sport more accessible. They created kids trails at Luton Park in Rockford and at Cannonsburg Ski Area. The Dirt Dawgs, a program started with Grand Rapids Bicycle Company, focuses on getting kids out on trails, teaching them

how to take care of the trail and park, as well as learn about healthy living through activity,” Eric said. “We both feel that giving should start close to home, so we seek out organizations that put money back into the community in which we live,” Theresa said.

### WHAT DO YOU GET FROM GIVING? WHY DO YOU GIVE?

“Through giving, we are able to be investors into our community. To see our city grow and flourish is the best reward. As they say, no one ever became poor from giving,” Theresa said.

### WHY GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION?

“Being given a choice as to where our donation would go was a huge plus. We wanted to focus our donation on our local parks and outdoor spaces. Anytime we see new green areas or recreation trails, we get excited that there is more for people to enjoy,” said Eric. “The Community Foundation was also transparent when it came to explaining how their organization was run. They made us feel like a part of the team and truly want their One Hundred New Philanthropists to be involved in the community aside from financial support. The Community Foundation has roots as deep as they come in our area. We have no question that our contribution will be used to benefit the community that we love,” Theresa said.



## Graci Harkema

*“The Community Foundation gives such broad support to so many organizations. If there is something you are passionate about, the Community Foundation is probably already involved in that work.”*

It's a long way from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa to Grand Rapids, but it's a journey that is always forefront in the mind of philanthropist Graci Harkema.

As a newborn, she spent her first days in an orphanage—tiny, weak, sick and not expected to live. By chance or divine intervention, her missionary parents found and adopted her. Their faith, hope, love and care helped Graci not only survive, but thrive. Now, three decades later, she's a Senior Account Recruiting Manager at TEKsystems and a proud downtown Grand Rapids resident. She supports causes that focus on equity and inclusion, especially racial, gender or sexual orientation expression. “My whole life has revolved around some aspect of equity and inclusion,” Graci said. Whether as an African native with Caucasian parents, or winning a spot as a kicker on the Grandville High School football team or coming out, being an advocate for inclusion comes naturally to Graci. She looks to support organizations that truly create opportunities for all people in the community.

### WHY I GIVE

“The reason I give is that I have been given so many great opportunities, and the very least I can do is give back. One reason I'm so passionate about Our LGBT Fund is because, growing up, I didn't know of another black woman who was out in the LGBT community who I could look up to or admire. Now I strive to be that person for other young people. Giving to Our LGBT Fund helps me be that role model,” Graci said. She notes that, although straight allies created many organizations to help the LGBT community, this fund was created by LGBT donors. “I think that our fund empowers my LGBT peers to step up and help our own community. We need to lead,” she said.

### WHY GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION?

“The Community Foundation gives such broad support to so many organizations. If there is something you are passionate about, the Community Foundation is probably already involved in that work. I appreciate its sustainability aspect too. The Community Foundation has been around a long time. I feel good that my funds are going to make an impact for years to come, and they have a solid team of people there you can trust.”

 R.K. /  B.E.

## ONE HUNDRED NEW PHILANTHROPISTS

As Grand Rapids Community Foundation moves toward its 100th anniversary in 2022, we want to recognize people's philanthropy. That's why we created our One Hundred New Philanthropists campaign. This outreach effort asks people to do just four simple things:

- Make an annual gift to the Community Foundation.
- Volunteer in the community.
- Make a provision in your estate plan for the Community Foundation.
- Share your philanthropic story with others.



Thanks to Theresa + Eric and Graci for sharing their stories here. If you are interested in becoming part of One Hundred New Philanthropists, please contact Jenine Prus Torres at 616.454.1751 or email her at [jtorres@grfoundation.org](mailto:jtorres@grfoundation.org).



# Four Grants to Benefit the LGBT Community in West Michigan

*We thank all the donors who have contributed to the fund and made these grants possible.*

## Arbor Circle: Safe Impact/True Colors: \$20,000

**Purpose:** To establish a partnership with the nationally recognized True Colors Fund. Created by singer Cyndi Lauper, the True Colors Fund works to end homelessness among LGBT youth. It connects individuals within communities and communities with one another to build capacity to prevent and address LGBT youth homelessness.

**Why it matters:** The local project will develop a strategic plan and create support strategies to end homelessness for LGBT young people. As a liaison to the True Colors Fund, Arbor Circle will lead efforts to fully develop and implement the strategic plan. They see active participation from community systems, stakeholders and LGBT youth as critical to the process.

## Grand Rapids Trans Foundation: \$2,500

**Purpose:** To provide one college or trade school scholarship for a transgender student. The Grand Rapids Trans Foundation has been providing scholarships since 2015.

**Why it matters:** “We believe that a solid education is vital for creating financial stability and successful futures, which in turn will create conditions less likely to involve homelessness. Academic scholarships lessen the financial burden of attending college and free up money

for rent, food and other necessities. Likewise, freedom from post-college debt can also have an enormous impact on a person’s ability to survive and thrive,” said Simon Kittok, Grand Rapids Trans Foundation executive director.

## Out on the Lakeshore: \$5,000

**Purpose:** To help establish the Out on the Lakeshore Center, a place where Holland-area LGBT people, their families, friends and allies can safely gather and meet. The center will have space for organizational meetings, support groups and social functions.

**Why it matters:** Patterned after the successful LGBT resource/community centers in Benton Harbor and Kalamazoo, this new place will be a visible community presence, where LGBT youth can connect with one another and organizations can offer support services.

## Well House: \$20,000

**Purpose:** To purchase and renovate a house for young people who identify as LGBT and are facing or experiencing homelessness. Well House opened its first youth home earlier this year. It provides permanent low-cost housing and a “house parent” who lives in the house and helps the young adults identify and access support services to help build their lives. Well House will purchase and renovate a second youth

home, this one dedicated to youth who have been made homeless because of their sexual/gender identification.

**Why it matters:** “At Well House, we believe in meeting our tenants where they are in their journey, and we aim to house neighbors who are struggling the most. We work hard to avoid categorizing anyone whenever possible; yet, national data suggests that approximately 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as LGBT. For a host of reasons, these youth are often fearful to disclose who they are. Opening a home for these youth signals that we accept them as they are, and we respect them as people who need safe, affordable housing. We look forward to providing a home where another marginalized group will have an opportunity to thrive,” said Tami Vandenberg, Well House executive director.



## this & that



Giuliana Fuentes

Grand Rapids Community Foundation is pleased to welcome Giuliana Fuentes as our Challenge Scholars assistant. She’ll be working with the Challenge Scholars team on tracking data, enrolling students, communicating with families and helping move the program forward. Giuliana has been involved in community work for the last eight years. Her passion for serving the Grand Rapids community started when she served as medical interpreter with AmeriCorps at a local clinic. Most recently she worked at Health Net of West Michigan as education coordinator. Giuliana also played a key role in developing FitKids360 en Español. She received a B.A. in photography from Grand Valley State University. She can be reached at [gffuentes@grfoundation.org](mailto:gffuentes@grfoundation.org).

Congratulations to our PR & Marketing team for winning four PRoof awards from the West Michigan Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. Our magazine, Current, won a gold award in the magazine category. We received silver awards in integrated communications for our planned giving campaign; in special publications for our Dreams and Deeds annual report; and in development or fundraising, for One Hundred New Philanthropists.





# Our Rites of Spring



In May, we celebrated with donors and Challenge Scholars at a luncheon at Grand Valley State University. The 50 student attendees were Union High School freshmen and represent the first class of Challenge Scholars to reach high school. Karl Nelson, Union’s principal, honored students with academic achievement certificates, and GVSU President Thomas Haas welcomed them to the downtown campus.



For four years now, we’ve been inviting Challenge Scholars and their families to be officially welcomed to the program. The induction ceremony, held at Union High School, gathers Harrison Park and Westwood sixth graders to hear inspiring talks from community leaders and Union High students. Then they walk across a stage and get greeted by school principals and teachers, thus marking their entrance to the program. A family dinner is held after the ceremony. This year more than 500 people attended the April 27 event.

# There's Nothing Better Than Time Spent With You!

It's always a great time when we gather with donors. Last winter and spring we had three events that brought us together.



Christina Arnold



Stan VanderRoest with Peggy Smith and Christine Flowers



George Grant with Dee Lucas and Charlotte Booker



Gwen Dawkins and Bev Drake

Our **AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE FUND** lunch in February commemorated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fund, which has awarded \$35,500 in grants since its inception. Its grantees include Ebony Road Players, Grand Rapids Urban Young Life, Jubilee Jobs, and New Hope Baptist Church's "Summer Blast Program."



Graci Harkema, Matthew Downey, Mindy Ysasi and Skot Welch.

**KNOTTY COCKTAILS** is a donor and soon-to-be donor event. Along with liquid refreshments, we provide a discussion forum for knotty community issues. We've covered gentrification, affordable housing, shifting demographics in Kent County and the Grand Rapids Public Schools' Transformation Plan. At our March event, held at GRAM, we talked about the importance of civic engagement and how personal networks play a role in changing a community's power dynamics, especially regarding inclusion and equity.



Paola Mendivil, Stacy Stout, Anel Guel and Carola Carassa



Dr. Tony Foster and Linda Neme Foster



Leandro Robles

We hosted an April party for **ONE HUNDRED NEW PHILANTHROPISTS**. With more than 61 members in just five years, we're likely to exceed the 100 number by the time of Grand Rapids Community Foundation's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022. Each of our One Hundred New donors is assigned a number that reflects the order in which they joined, so at the party we played with numbers in front of the Varnum photo wall. It was especially meaningful that our first two members, Dr. Tony and Linda Neme Foster, were there to celebrate with us.



Kathy Vogelsang



Diana Sieger, Christina Keller and Amy Ruis



# The Booming, Looming Retirement Crisis

Not everyone's retirement comes with a lifetime of savings, French countryside tours or time to finally learn to sail. No, for many it's quite the opposite—no savings, working full time for a long time and anxiety about earning enough to keep the house.

No one has made that reality more vivid than author Elizabeth White and her latest book, *Fifty-Five, Unemployed, and Faking Normal*, self-published in late 2016. She begins the book with an essay, more a confession really, of her life—now—unemployed, little saved and “cobbling together an income.”

She, who holds a bachelor's degree from Oberlin, a master's in international studies from Johns Hopkins and a Harvard MBA, faces financial insecurity at 63. Her book shines a light on the plight of nearly half of all U.S. baby boomers right now. According to a 2016 Price Waterhouse Coopers survey, these boomers have set aside only \$100,000 or less for their retirement.

This calamity crosses the entire socioeconomic, education and geographic spectrum. Yet, no one is recognizing and discussing it as the national crisis that it is. No one, that is, except Elizabeth White, who travels across the country speaking to various groups, from the halls of MIT, populated by those like herself, to rural western Tennessee, with an audience of unemployed factory workers, who, also like Elizabeth, never expected to be in this situation.



Elizabeth White

Elizabeth's message is heartfelt but stern—part friend, part commanding officer. She suggests you mourn your current circumstances, but then take stock, make tough decisions and get on with your life. As she puts it, “We need to reject magical thinking. The cavalry is not coming. We must learn how to achieve a richly-textured life on a limited income.”

“The people I speak to feel isolated, alone, ashamed because we don't talk about it.” She says that most of them “want to be

seen,” but didn't realize that there were others like them, facing the same grim reality of growing older, fearing the future and being financially fragile.

She says that many people have to “get off their throne” and begin to feel deeply grounded in their life right now—as she is doing. Recently Elizabeth boarded a Greyhound bus for a ten-hour ride from Washington DC to West Virginia for a conference rather than booking a flight. (She also used the senior discount!)

“This is what I'm doing,” she explains. “We must be willing to be in the world in a different way,” she says. We, as a society, have never been here before. “There are no pathways or role models; there are no policies to help or guide us.”

Elizabeth will be speaking in Grand Rapids on Friday, September 15, for a conference hosted by Grand Rapids Community Foundation through its Encore initiative. The conference will convene people re-thinking “normal” retirement. It will offer discussion sessions ranging from innovative housing models to resilience circles to the new sharing economy to intergenerational connections. The conference seeks to celebrate and spotlight people finding solutions in these new retirement realities.



J.Z.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR TO SEE ELIZABETH ON SEPTEMBER 15.**  
Stay up to date by liking **EncoreGRCF** on Facebook.

## TRUSTEE AND STAFF FUNDS ON THE RISE

It's important that donors know they're in good company when they support Grand Community Foundation. Knowing that Trustees and staff establish funds reinforces that we are all in this together. We thought we'd share a list of our Trustees, former Trustees and staff members who have funds at the Community Foundation. They are listed by fund founder and fund name.

	FUND FOUNDER	FUND NAME
CURRENT TRUSTEES	Andy and Christina Keller	Andy and Christina Keller Fund
	Emily Loeks	Loeks Family Fund – Emily
	Michael and Christina Rosloniec Family	Michael and Christina Rosloniec Family Fund
	Richard A. Roane and Leandro Robles	Richard Roane and Leandro Robles Families Donor Advised Fund
	Laurie Finney Beard	Laurie Finney Beard Family Fund
FORMER TRUSTEES	James W. Carpenter*	Cherry (Mrs. James) Carpenter Fund for Children
	Charles* and Stella Royce	Charles L. Royce and Stella A. Royce Fund (St. Cecelia Music Center)
	Charles Sligh*	Sligh Memorial Fund
	Minnie C. Blodgett*	Minnie C. Blodgett for Clinic for Infant Feeding
	Louis A. Cornelius*	Louis A. Cornelius Trust
	Edward C. McCobb*	Mr. and Mrs. Edward C. McCobb Fund
	Jeanette Shelly Warner*	Jeanette Shelly Warner Fund
	Janet A. Haynes	Janet A. Haynes and Kelsey Haynes Advised Fund
	Bob and Marcy Roth	Roth Family Fund
	Arend and Nancy Lubbers	Andy Lubbers be nice. Memorial Fund and Andy Lubbers Memorial Fund for Mental Health
	Earl and Donnalee Holton	Earl and Donnalee Holton Advised Fund
	Anonymous	Anonymous
	Patricia H. Edison	William and Patricia Edison Fund
	Mr. and Mrs. David G. Frey	Mr. and Mrs. David G. Frey Fund
	Richard Haslinger	Haslinger Family Fund
STAFF	Andy and Tracy Van Solkema	Andy and Tracy Van Solkema Family Fund
	Lynne Black	Lynne M. Black Fund
	Marilyn and Garrett Zack	Zack Family Fund
	Stanley M. Vander Roest	Stan and Jackie Vander Roest Fund
	Diana R. Sieger	Diana Sieger Leadership Fund
	Laurie and Crawford Craft	Laurie and Crawford Craft Family Fund

\*deceased



## Metz Legacy Society Profile: Jim and Marilyn Galer

Parents are often grateful to people who help their children find success or happiness. Teachers, Scout leaders, coaches, aunts and uncles or other children’s parents can play a role in shaping a young person’s life. Jim and Marilyn Galer are showing their gratitude with a planned gift to Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

Their daughter, soprano Suzanne Galer, needed financial aid while working her way through college on her way to a career in vocal music performance. After a family friend, Probate Judge A. Dale Stoppels, connected the Galers to the Community Foundation, Suzanne applied for and was awarded a scholarship in 1980. It helped her earn a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the State University of New York, Stonybrook.

“She was supported throughout her doctorate by the Community Foundation,” Jim said. “Grand Rapids Community Foundation came through for us at such a critical time and helped Suzanne, and we’re just paying it forward. The Community Foundation was just there for us. We know that they are going to carefully manage anything we leave and direct it to something that focuses on music,” Marilyn said.

The couple, now retired from teaching, met at Hope College during the college’s legendary All College Pull tug of war. They lived in Maryland during Jim’s time in military service and then began education careers. Jim worked for 40 years in Zeeland Public Schools. Over 35 years, Marilyn taught in New York, Grandville and Jenison.

Their ongoing passion, besides music, is local history. “When I was trying to teach the history of the area [Jenison and Grandville], there were no resources, so we made our own,” Marilyn said. She and co-writers Esther Huyser Kunnen and Virginia Timmer spent 10 years researching and working on

*“Grand Rapids Community Foundation came through for us at such a critical time and helped Suzanne, and we’re just paying it forward. The Community Foundation was just there for us.”*

*Bend in the River*, a history of the communities of Jenison and Grandville. Edited by John W. McGee and released by Eerdmans Publishing in 1973, the book is still a source of pride for its collaborative nature. “We involved as many people as we could in gathering information. Once you’re hooked on history, you won’t give it up,” Marilyn said. Several years later, frustrated by a lack of age-appropriate local history material, Marilyn and other Jenison educators wrote a children’s version of the book for third grade students. As retirees, Jim and Marilyn spend time at the Jenison Museum teaching third graders about

the history of the community they love.

While they’re comfortably settled in Grandville with three Pekingese dogs, they spent 19 of their retirement years in Manistee, close to the Lake Michigan shore. “While living in Manistee, we were quite involved with the Ramsdell Theatre there. When Suzanne would come home in the summer, she would be involved in many productions there. She organized a voice school and helped with a gala that the students put on,” Jim said.

The Galers are members of Central Reformed Church and recently joined the Grandville Community Chorus. Their son, James Klyn Galer, works as an engineer in Kalamazoo. He and his wife Julie have two children, Ryleigh and Mitchell. Julie is an elementary educator in Grandville Public Schools.



Marilyn Zack



Jenine Prus Torres

To learn more about Metz Legacy Society, please contact Marilyn or Jenine at 616.454.1751.



# MY COMMUNITY MATTERS

## OUR NORTH STAR

**F**inding the North Star can be challenging. Gazing at the night sky from the front porch of my home, I spot the Big Dipper. I trace an imaginary line from the Big Dipper's two edge stars to find the Little Dipper's handle. The North Star is at the end of the handle. So, what does stargazing have to do with Grand Rapids Community Foundation?

For the past year, we have been on an adaptive strategic journey. Rather than taking on a traditional strategic planning process, I determined that we needed a new and fresh direction, something that would challenge us to think differently about our work and our role in the community. The initial phase, a two-day research process with select staff, trustees and community members, led to the creation of what we call our North Star. Like any star in the sky, it sits alongside the other stars—our values, mission and vision—that guide our work.

### OUR NORTH STAR

*For West Michigan to grow and prosper, we must make sure that everyone can apply their talents and creativity to fuel our future. It is only by connecting across perspectives and overcoming inequities that we can build and sustain an inclusive economy and thriving community.*

### WHY THIS, WHY NOW?

Consider this paragraph from "Addressing Economic Inclusion in Grand Rapids," a 2016 report commissioned by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation: "The Grand Rapids region can take pride in its economic achievements, as it emerges as a growing region in a relatively low-growth state. Even though Grand Rapids has made great strides, many persistent challenges remain. One of the most pressing challenges is the

*"For West Michigan to grow and prosper, we must make sure that everyone can apply their talents and creativity to fuel our future."*



concentrated poverty experienced by city residents in the near west and near south neighborhoods. These neighborhood residents often lack assets, education and training, and access to opportunities. As a result, a large segment of the city's population cannot keep up economically. Given these realities, **how can the Grand Rapids region truly thrive when a large segment of its core continues to fall further behind?**

How indeed?!

Our region can't thrive without all of us doing well—and we are firm believers that education is where it begins. We know that without post-secondary education, people seeking work will always be limited in what they can earn. Those without a high school diploma face even harsher financial circumstances.

### WORK UNDERWAY

Our Challenge Scholars program is our greatest effort that shows how we can build an inclusive economy. Along with many organizations, businesses, area colleges and the Grand Rapids Public Schools, we are creating the conditions for change on Grand Rapids' West Side. We are providing the opportunity for families to ultimately thrive. The focus is on students who may be the first in their families to graduate from high school and then go on to college or learn a trade.

Another example of helping everyone thrive is the recent \$20,000 grant we made to The SOURCE (see page 3). It offers a program that teaches people employed in low-paying jobs to write software code. While learning to code isn't fast or easy, it can lead to a job that pays a living wage. Our preferred future is that everyone will have access to good paying jobs, safe and affordable housing, quality public education and much more! In the coming months, as we change our grantmaking focus, you can expect to hear more about this kind of work.

Is this a different road for the Community Foundation? Not necessarily, but our organizational compass (North Star, values, mission, and vision) is clearly pointing us to focus on helping our community be a place where all people can prosper.

**All aspects of this Community Foundation will be in alignment with our North Star—grantmaking, fund development, communication, administration, finance and human resources.** I look forward to providing more information here in Current and on our website about our adaptive strategy process. If you have any questions or ideas, please reach out: my email is dsieger@grfoundation.org.

*Dianna Sieger*

*If you are receiving duplicate copies of Current, let us know, and please pass one along to a friend.*

## FAST TRACK TO SUCCESS: The Sekayi Bracey Story

When East Kentwood native Sekayi Bracey was just 8 years old, her elementary gym teacher encouraged her to pursue running.

“We had a field day,” Sekayi said. “(My teacher) realized how fast I was. He told my mother that I had a gift and I could go somewhere with it.”

Eleven years later, she’s still running and can claim 10 individual state titles earned during her high school track career. Sekayi also earned a spot on the women’s track team, with a full-ride scholarship to Purdue University in Indiana.

Not long after being discovered by her teacher, Sekayi began running competitively. In 2006, when she was 8 years old, Sekayi ranked third in Michigan in her age group for the long jump and 200-yard dash.

Sekayi was highly involved with the Grand Rapids Track Club’s summer youth program. It was her mother, Yamaka Bracey, who founded the group. “I was running alone until she started it,” Sekayi said, describing her experience as “amazing.”

“Honestly, it got me to where I’m at today. (It helped me) accomplish the things I did in high school, like breaking records and becoming a state champion,” she said.

### SHINING THEN AND NOW



Little Girl, Big Jump



Flying High at Purdue

The Youth Grant Committee at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation awarded a grant to the track program that year, and Sekayi was featured in our annual report for 2005-2006.

Now she’s a college freshman with aspirations to work in forensics someday. Another one of her major goals is to compete in the 2020 Olympics. “That has been my dream since I was 8, so I really am seeking to fulfill that,” Sekayi said.

She advises anyone who also wants to be a college athlete to “stay focused.”

“Always take care of the little things, because the little things help build up to the major things in life. Focus on keeping your

grades good, and, when it’s hard, always just push through, because you are going to have hard days sometimes,” she said.

Sekayi describes her running as “an escape.” Prior to each race, she tries to “really visualize each jump I’m gonna do, before I go onto the track.”

Her personal records include a 60m dash of 7.41 seconds, 100m of 11.68 seconds, 200m of 23.61 seconds and a long jump of 19 feet, 8 inches.

Among these accomplishments, she is most proud of attending college. Sekayi said this is because her parents did not have the same opportunity as she has. She is the oldest of five children in her family, and her siblings are all runners too—“which is crazy, because neither of our parents ran.”

Growing up, her role model was Florence Griffith Joyner (Flo-Jo), who is considered to be the fastest woman of all time. Sekayi said that having the ability to inspire people, like Flo-Jo, makes her want to have an impact in the running world.

“God got me to the place I am today, and he has blessed me with a gift,” she said.

*Recent photo taken at Purdue by Matt Staudt, older photo by Bill Hebert.*