

# PIONEER POST

## East Grand Rapids Alumni Newsletter

### Spring 2023



## Honorees Announced for Awards Dinner

Save the date for the Foundation's Community Service and Distinguished Alumni Awards dinner! On Wednesday, September 13, lifelong community supporter Betsy Willey (EGRHS class of '64) will be honored with the Community Service and Leadership Award. Climate and Energy Journalist and former Wall Street Journal Middle East Bureau Chief Bill Spindle (EGRHS class of '81) will receive the Distinguished Alumni Award. The dinner will be at the JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids.

For 60 years, lifelong community supporter **Betsy Wood Willey** (EGRHS class of '64) has been giving back. A former teacher and author, Betsy was a co-founder of the Leadership and Youth Development program at East Grand Rapids High School. She has served as President of both the Mary Free Bed Guild and the EGRHS PTSA, served on the boards of Universal Health Solutions, Camp Newaygo, and Arts in Motion, and for more than 20 years, Betsy led students and adults into the wilderness of the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. As a lifelong environmentalist, activist, and teacher, Betsy educates others on climate change and the degradation of the earth. As a community leader, Betsy models activism, wisdom, caring, integrity, and wholeheartedness as she brings out the best in those she mentors.

**Bill Spindle** (EGRHS class of '81) has covered some of the most pressing issues of our time during his more than 30 years as a leading journalist. For more than two decades, he worked for the Wall Street Journal, based in Tokyo, New York, Rome, Dubai, and New Delhi while reporting from more than 30 countries from Latin America to China. He's worked for Newsday and Bloomberg News, and his work has appeared in The Atlantic, Fortune, and the New York Review of Books. Bill was also part of the leadership team that established The National, a newspaper in the United Arab Emirates. For the last several years, Bill has written about climate and energy, first as an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, then at Semafor, and now as senior global correspondent for Cipher by Breakthrough Energy.

Please check [the Awards Dinner page on our website](#) later this summer for updated ticket information for the event.



JW Marriott, Grand Rapids, MI  
6:00 p.m.

• • HONORING • •  
**Community Service and Leadership Award Recipient**  
Betsy Willey, Class of 1964  
Lifelong Community Supporter  
**Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient**  
Bill Spindle, Class of 1981  
Climate and Energy Journalist and  
Former Wall Street Journal Middle East Bureau Chief

Sponsorships and reservations available July 2023.  
For further information please visit [www.egrfsf.org](http://www.egrfsf.org)



## Reunions Scheduled This Summer and Fall

**Class of 1958** | 65th Reunion - September 29-30

**Class of 1962** | 60th +1 Reunion - October 13

**Class of 1963** | 60th Reunion - September 23

**Class of 1968** | 55th Reunion - September 23

**Class of 1973** | 50th Reunion - October 6-7

**Class of 1983** | 40th Reunion - September 29-30

**Class of 1993** | 30th Reunion - September 29-30

**Class of 1998** | 25th Reunion - July 15

**Class of 2002** | 20th +1 Reunion - October 21

**Class of 2003** | 20th Reunion - June 24

**Class of 2008** | 15th Reunion - September 8

**Class of 2013** | 10th Reunion - TBD-Thanksgiving 2023

**Class of 2018** | 5th Reunion - November 22

**Homecoming - Friday and Saturday, September 29-30**

Find more reunion information on our [Events and Class News pages](#). The Foundation provides reunion planning support for all East classes. [Contact Maria Allen](#), Alumni Relations Coordinator for more information.



## You Did That!

If you've given to the Foundation, thank you. If you've attended a Foundation event, thank you. If you've supported our mission--in any way--thank you. You're part of our biggest year ever!

Our "You Did That!" impact statement is now available on our website, [egrfsf.org](http://egrfsf.org). It includes photos and articles about the 40+ classroom enhancement grants totaling \$246,961 that the Foundation--thanks to our donors--has provided this school year. It also includes descriptions of the program support we're providing to our schools--above and beyond the classroom grants--with our Mental Health and Wellness Fund, a school social worker, and the Elementary Learning Commons Coordinator position.

Thank you! [You did that!](#)

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.



## Spring Sports Roundup: Girls Track and Field Wins State Title #150, Extending East's State Record

Baseball: Compiled winning season record, lost in second round of playoffs.  
 Boys Golf: Great season highlighted by individual top tens at various tournaments and a team victory at the Cardinal Invitational.  
 Boys Lacrosse: Compiled 9-4 regular season record and reached regional final.  
 Crew: Had the most rowers in program history with 76 rowers, including 40 novices new to the sport this year.  
 Girls Lacrosse: Made it to the state championship game, finishing as state runner-up.  
 Girls Soccer: Made it to the state championship game, finishing as state runner-up.  
 Girls Tennis: Reached the state finals, where they finished seventh.  
 Girls Water Polo: Made it to the state championship game, finishing as state runner-up.  
 Track and Field: Girls won second consecutive state title and the 150th in school history in all sports, extending East's record for state championships by one school.

**Foundation Connection:** [You can check The Cheat Sheet on our website, egrfsf.org, for a weekly listing of what's happening in our schools, sports, the arts, and our city.](http://egrfsf.org)



## Foundation Supports Performing Arts in All Our Schools

Many East alumni have made names for themselves in theater, television, and film. Many more have created lifelong memories and learned valuable life lessons from their experience in high school performances.

From ads in Playbill programs to numerous classroom enhancement grants, the Foundation—thanks to our donors—is proud to contribute thousands of dollars every year to support the performing arts in our elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school.

This school year, grants from the Foundation helped fund digital pianos at the middle and high school, a trip to the Stratford Festival for the drama club, a trip to Orlando for high school music classes, a fight choreographer for the fall play, annual support for the marching band, a clinic and performance by the Eclectic String Music Ensemble, and more than \$15,000 for new wireless microphones.

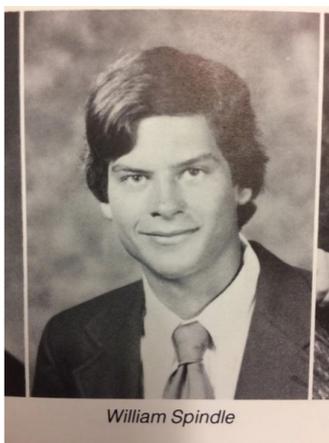
*Foundation Connection: Thanks to our donors, the Foundation helps fund performances attended by thousands of our community members every year.*



## Once Students, Now Alumni, Always Pioneers

On Thursday, May 25, on a gorgeous spring night, the class of 2023 held its graduation ceremony on Memorial Field. Over the course of the students' years in East schools, from kindergarten through graduation, the Foundation—thanks to our donors—contributed more than \$5 million to their education. Now, that gift is theirs to share with the world.

Congratulations, class of 2023!



## A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Bill Spindle '81, Revisited

*Since Bill Spindle will be the recipient of this fall's Distinguished Alumni award (see above), we're re-sharing the interview we did with him in 2017.*

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

Not all three? I get home so rarely! Some rules are made to be broken, if carefully and in moderation at my age. So maybe one each day over a long weekend, followed by weeks of attempts at dieting?

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

Circuitous, although looking back I suppose there's a logic that wasn't so clear as it was all happening. After working at the student paper at the University of Michigan, I careened through various freelance and full time jobs in journalism: a few months at the Grand Rapids Press, the Ann Arbor News and then — after a year at Columbia University's graduate journalism school in New York — Newsday on Long Island.

In 1992 I moved to Japan with my wife, who needed to do her field research for a PhD in Japanese art history. I worked at BusinessWeek magazine and Bloomberg News in Tokyo before landing at The Direct Journal. Eventually I moved to the University of Michigan's main office — which was directly across the street from the World Trade Center — to become assistant foreign editor. That was early in 2001. With our toddler and newborn, we got an apartment two blocks from the office, on opposite side of the Towers. Six months later, the 9-11 attacks completely destroyed the Journal's offices, though miraculously no one at the paper was killed or injured. I got out of our offices before the worst of it. My family and I then made a relatively harrowing escape from lower Manhattan.

But the attacks thrust me into more than a decade of editing and reporting about the Middle East. We were based in Rome for several years, then Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. I was in Iraq for parts of the U.S. occupation and its aftermath, and in Syria both before and after it collapsed into civil war. I've made almost a dozen reporting trips to Iran, as well as Israel and nearly every other country in the Middle East. Along this journey I've written about everything from the Japanese automobile industry, Arabic-language TV shows, Iran's youth music culture, the collapse of global financial markets, ISIS, OPEC and the global cashew nut industry. I currently live and work in India, based in New Delhi.

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

I think I learned to appreciate the value of making — of learning how to learn. That's been my thing and butter as a journalist, quickly making sense of and then explaining so many different things while retaining a healthy appreciation of just how much you don't know and understand.

**What were you like in school?**

Curious and confident enough to get myself into classes where I usually then was awed by how smart the other students were. I managed, but often with considerable struggle.

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

Bert Froyland instilled a love of language and appreciation for the discipline that went into the best writing. I was dazzled by the intelligence of teachers in the science department and came away with a lifelong fascination with physics and have even put some vaguely recalled knowledge of chemistry to work while writing about the energy industry, my struggles in those classes notwithstanding.

**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?**

Well, this probably shouldn't be it, but.....the rock on the far side of Reeds Lake, end of senior year. For our senior prank about 50 of us kidnapped a couple hundred books from the library in a dramatic raid in broad daylight and held them hostage. We demanded as ransom a can of USDA approved tuna fish, a Canadian penny and something else silly that I can no longer recall but was reasonably hard to obtain. We gave the administration a day and time to make the drop at the rock in order to get the books back. Lo and behold, assistant principal Burt Bleke drove up at the appointed hour and delivered. They had a sense of humor! We returned the books, which I can now reveal were hidden in my garage under the nose of my mother, who was at the time the head of the school board. I'm assuming the statute of limitations on this sort of thing has run out by now.

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

Life, when I looked ahead to it, seemed like it would be so planned-out somehow. Who knew a career could consist of simply doing what seems fun, interesting or necessary, sometimes simply being buffeted along by events, one thing following the next?

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

A few good friends, mainly by following them over social media. After barely leaving Michigan through college, I've lived overseas for all but four of the past 25 years.

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

Don't dismiss simply doing something that's fun and interesting. Amazing where that can take you...

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

Jim McDonald (class of '81!).

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

Oh my, then you'd just ask me about that...journalists know how that game works!



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

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