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GULL LAKE *Living*



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Gull Lake Community Schools Foundation



Celebrating the Gull Lake Community Schools Foundation and their 40 years of Impact on our community!

Written by Edward Schaadt | Courtesy of the GL Community Schools Foundation

The Gull Lake Community Schools Foundation cherishes the spirit of giving, fostering generosity year-round. This month my focus will be on the history of a relatively new organization, as the school foundation celebrates forty years of service to the students and teachers at Gull Lake.

In the Kalamazoo area, school foundations were first being formed in the 1980s. School budgets were stretched to the limits in order to provide for a basic education, but some progressive communities wanted to offer broader educational opportunities than would be available primarily from tax sources. Many residents were willing to give generously to an organization that was allowed by law to accept tax-deductible gifts to enhance and expand the educational opportunities of our students. Some of the area school districts that started school foundations in the 1980s

were Portage, Galesburg, Comstock, Vicksburg, Mattawan, and Otsego.

In August of 1983, the Gull Lake Community Schools Foundation was created, and the trustees opened a savings account with \$200. The first Board of Directors included Tom Geil, Everett Hiestand, Jud Knapper, John Lawrence, Joyce Melvin, Tom Merritt, Peter Ordway, Thomas Ryan and Robert (Bo) Van Peenan.

During the first five years, the Foundation was able to fund a few projects, made possible by generous donations. The list included science equipment, computers, and software for both middle and high school students, and mini-grants for teachers. In 1986, the Foundation held its first Honors Banquet (now labeled Distinguished Academic Scholars) to honor the top academic seniors and their most influential educator.



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The Foundation's success during its first decade led to the appointment of Jim Jasiak as treasurer and made it possible to hire Bonnie Kuepfer as Foundation Administrator in 1993, a position she still holds today.

Donations came from the community in different ways: general donations, gifts in memory of loved ones, in honor of individuals, in matching grants from other foundations, for scholarships, family endowments, and financial support for special programs such as the Sparks Series.

As the Foundation began its second decade, it was now in a position to offer grants of its own. A grant process was developed along with a grant form in 1994. Five years later, in 1999, the first grant review committee was formed. Joyce Melvin, one of the founders of the GLCS Foundation, recalled two teachers who were the recipients of grants in the early years of the Foundation. Nancy Kellogg, a business teacher, knew that the computer was a tool of the future. She applied and was awarded a grant to provide computers for her classroom.

Robin Nott joined the staff of Gull Lake High School in 1987 as a drama and theater teacher. Robin created the Performing Arts Company (PAC) and developed a dynamic theater program with numerous grants from the Foundation. Three years after Robin retired in 2015, the community approved a \$65-million-dollar bond issue that included a performing arts center featuring a 900-seat auditorium, a lobby/concessions area, a control room, a scene shop, an orchestra pit, and a performance stage area.

All teachers, staff members and students from all schools have been encouraged to seek grants from the Foundation whose goal is to enhance education for all students, including those who attend Gateway Academy and the Virtual Partnership. Over the years, students have been granted money to attend camps at the Cheff Center, called Read and Ride, and the Sherman Lake YMCA, and participate in an elementary Lego program for K-5 students, a precursor to the more advanced Robotics program. Students at Ryan Intermediate benefit from a multi-year grant for the "Leader in Me" program and all staff receive annual district-wide training with speakers such as authors George Couros and Joe Sanfilippo. Staff members can obtain grants from the Foundation. to attend a variety of educational conferences.

Robotics has become a very popular activity among Gull Lake students from Young-5's through 12th grade. In fact, 1 in 12 GL students are now involved in Robotics, a part of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Students build robots that can perform an assigned task in competition with teams from other schools. The program also fosters teamwork and helping others. To that end, high school GL Robotics members mentor middle schoolers and assist with elementary programs. Financial support for the Gull Lake teams comes from the Foundation and corporations.

Another extracurricular organization at the high school that is supported by the Foundation is Model UN (United Nations), where students gain skills in public speaking, critical thinking, and in-depth research. The Model UN experience allows students to cultivate skills, enrich their knowledge of global affairs, and give them a better worldview.

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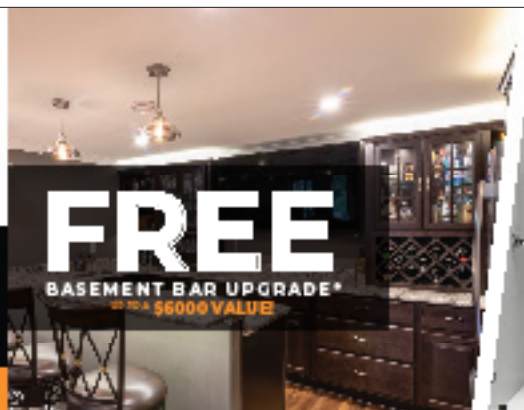


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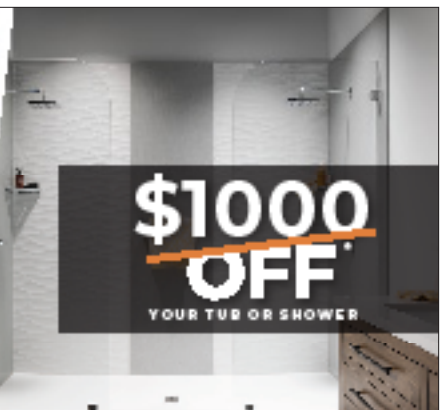
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In 2019, the Chris Rundle Innovation Grant for Educators was established in honor of our former school superintendent, who valued and fostered innovation in education. Each Chris Rundle grant awarded spans up to five years and up to \$25,000 and connects Gull Lake students to innovative best practices from global leaders and the latest development technology.

Since the Foundation was established, there have been 972 grants awarded for a total of \$1,586,000. For a more detailed list of grants awarded, please refer to the Foundation website: <http://www.glcsf.org/grants>

Scholarships have also been an important part of the Foundation's mission. In 1994, the Michael Bailey Memorial Scholarship was the first scholarship awarded. In 2005, the Ryan Family established the James R. Ryan Family Foundation Scholarship. James Ryan was the younger brother of Tom Ryan, who served as the superintendent of the Gull Lake Community Schools for 26 years and was a founding member of the Foundation. The scholarship was unique because it was given to an 8th grader who demonstrated a financial need and the potential for academic success. The scholarship covered four years of college. Twenty students were recipients of this scholarship until the family moved the scholarship last year to Comstock Schools where Superintendent Ryan's children grew up and graduated from high school.

Scholarships are usually funded by groups or individuals in the community. Scholarship requirements vary and are available to high school juniors and seniors, headed to universities, trade schools and community colleges in many areas of study. Grade point averages vary as

well, so GLCS Foundation encourages all to review these requirements and apply from the beginning of Winter Break 2023 to March 1, 2024. In some instances, company matching applies to scholarships and other donations. Such was the case with the Fry Family Scholarship. Rusty and Julie Fry are long-time supporters of the Foundation and also donated to the Covid-19 Relief Fund and their contribution was matched 5x by the Kellogg Foundation where Julie is a retiree.

Last year, 43 scholarships were awarded totaling \$82,000. Since 1994, 679 scholarships have been awarded for a total of \$1,590,000. For a complete list of scholarships awarded please refer to the Foundation website: <http://www.glcsf.org/scholarships>

In 2005, the Foundation developed a series of programs called the Spark Series, designed to inspire, broaden people's perspectives, enhance student experiences, and enrich the community. A former Gull Lake school board member, Dave Kreager, and his friend, John Grogan, grew up on the east side of our State. Grogan, a journalist by trade, had written a best-selling memoir that same year entitled, *Marley and Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog*. In 2008, Grogan's visit to students in the Gull Lake Schools and a special presentation at Western Michigan University kicked off what is now known as the Spark Series. Other authors and creators have continued to share their talents with our students as part of the series.

In November of 2012, the traveling exhibit, *The Wall That Heals*, made a four-day visit to Richland to bring generations together to honor our American veterans, foster a greater understanding and respect for the war and its effects on those who served, and to heal the emotional scars that have persisted for over 40 years. More than 8,000 visitors attended the event including over 3,000 Gull Lake students and almost 1,300 students from other districts.

In 2017, an outdoor classroom pavilion was completed and paid for by the Foundation with contributions from community donors. To commemorate the Foundation's 40th Anniversary, the Pavilion was dedicated and renamed "GLCSF Founders' Outdoor Classroom", in honor of the Foundation founders. The list of

worthy projects and programs has continued to grow and enrich the lives of Gull Lake students and the community.

The Foundation has also supported the One Community, One Book program, coming in February of 2024, for the second time. The goal of OCOB is to improve reading proficiency and literacy by providing every GLCS student Young-5's -12, including home school and virtual students, with the same book read by both students and parents. Last spring a spelling bee, GL SPELL, with local celebrity spellers, was held at the Gull Lake Center for the Fine Arts as a fundraiser to support this project with additional monies coming from sponsors. 3000 books have been purchased and the program will kick off with a surprise book reveal creating great excitement across the district.

The Foundation continues to improve education for Gull Lake students thanks to the kind support of donors from our community. Gifts, no matter the size, play a crucial role and are sincerely valued. Together, we make this progress possible! Visit glcsf.org to learn more.

The GLCS Foundation is a private 501(c)(3) non-profit school foundation established solely for the benefit of Gull Lake Community Schools.



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