



Grand Haven Area
Community Foundation

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Grand Haven Area Community Foundation Celebrates 40th Annual Excellence in Education

Grand Haven, MI — The Grand Haven Area Community Foundation (GHACF) proudly celebrated the 40th Annual Excellence in Education event on April 29 at Spring Lake Country Club, honoring outstanding graduating seniors and the educators who have made a lasting impact on their lives.

Each year, Excellence in Education recognizes top students from local high schools across Northwest Ottawa County, along with an educator chosen by each student for their meaningful influence. The event highlights not only academic achievement, but also the relationships that help shape student success.

This year's celebration marked a significant milestone, reflecting on four decades of recognizing excellence and investing in the future of the community.

"Excellence in Education is a powerful reminder that achievement does not happen in isolation," said Hadley Streng, President and CEO of GHACF. "Behind every student recognized is an educator who inspired them, challenged them, and helped them grow. Tonight is about honoring both."

The program traces its roots back to 1987, when the idea was first introduced to the Community Foundation by Dottie Johnson after learning of a similar initiative through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. What began as a new concept has grown into a cherished community tradition.

This year's event also welcomed several individuals connected to that very first year, including Dottie Johnson; Mary Jane Evink, a member of the inaugural class of honored students; and Ken Formsma, one of the first educators selected by a student for his impact.

Their connection to Excellence in Education extends well beyond that first year. After being recognized as a student, Mary Jane Evink went on to become an educator herself. Over the past four decades, both Evink and Formsma have continued to be nominated by students, reflecting the lasting impact they have had in the classroom. Together, they have been nominated 20 times over the 40-year history of the program.

“The Grand Haven Area Community Foundation has invested in the excellence of our youth for 40 years, a milestone that reflects both vision and deep commitment,” said Mary Jane Evink. “I was honored to be part of this celebration and remain just as inspired today as I was at the very first event in 1987. This is a uniquely meaningful evening where top scholars, their families, and educators come together not only to be recognized, but to express gratitude for the collective support that makes excellence possible. It is a powerful example of what it looks like when a community truly believes in its young people. I have no doubt these scholars will carry this experience with them and, in time, give back by investing their talents, leadership, and care into the communities they serve.”

The event is made possible through the generous support of the Alyce R. Erickson Field of Interest Fund. Vin Erickson, a founder of GHACF and its first Board President, and his wife Alyce were strong advocates for education and believed in the importance of recognizing excellence and investing in future generations.

In addition to celebrating students and educators, the Community Foundation extended its gratitude to families, school leaders, and community members whose support helps make student success possible.

For 40 years, Excellence in Education has reflected GHACF’s broader commitment to strengthening the community through education, philanthropy, and long-term investment in people.

To learn more about the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation and its work across Northwest Ottawa County, visit <https://ghacf.org/>.

About the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation

The Grand Haven Area Community Foundation is a public, charitable organization serving Northwest Ottawa County community since 1971. GHACF is regularly recognized as a top 100 Community Foundation in the nation and is the 8th largest community foundation in the State of Michigan. It encourages philanthropy by individuals, families, corporations, and organizations, and serves as a steward of their charitable funds and legacies. In addition to awarding grants, the Foundation offers technical support to nonprofits, convenes community leaders on issues of importance, and advocates for the nonprofit sector. For more information visit ghacf.org.