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SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AT ALL LEVELS OF  
THE OKEMOS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



**2017**

# OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

AWARDS BANQUET

**NOVEMBER 16, 2017  
KELLOGG CENTER, EAST LANSING**



# A message from the OEF Chair



Welcome to the 21st annual Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet.

Tonight we celebrate excellence in the Okemos school community. We look forward to introducing you to twelve people who have positively impacted our students and our community. As we honor these individuals and thank them for their contributions, let us also appreciate and celebrate Okemos Public Schools' culture of excellence.

How lucky we are to live in a community that so highly values quality education and which enjoys such a supportive team of administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and talented students. Tonight we celebrate all the many facets of excellence in Okemos.

Our evening is made extra-special by our keynote speaker, the new Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools. If you haven't had a chance to meet Alena Zachery-Ross, you are in for a treat. Her energy and enthusiasm for students and for excellence in public education is infectious, and it serves as an exciting preview of the future of our district under her leadership.

Finally, no celebration of this scope can be accomplished without considerable expense, so we are grateful to the many business and community sponsors who have donated in support of tonight's banquet. Please consider supporting these businesses to let them know that you appreciate their support of our students.

Thank you for attending tonight's celebration. The OEF Board of Trustees and I look forward to sharing with you an uplifting and inspiring evening that will leave us all feeling very proud of Okemos Public Schools.

## **Martha Hentz**

Board Chair, Okemos Education Foundation

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1996 – 1997 *Ross Woodstock*  
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## **WITH SINCERE APPRECIATION...**

### **Banquet Chair**

Sue Hallman and Michelle Mitchell

### **Awards Chair**

Deb Baughman

### **Master of Ceremonies**

Mark Bashore

### **Keynote Speaker**

Alena Zachery-Ross

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Kaivalya Kulkarni  
Uma Malde  
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# About the OEF

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**The Okemos Education Foundation** is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting academic excellence at all levels of the district, from kindergarten through high school. Since 1984, the OEF has given more than \$1 million to enhance academic experiences for our students. We also recognize and support the excellent staff of Okemos Public Schools and the contributions they make to our community.

## HOW WE SUPPORT OKEMOS STUDENTS:

**OEF Grants** encourage innovative and creative teaching and provide expanded educational opportunities for students. Items and experiences funded by OEF grants vary each year, based on the requests received by staff. Last year, the OEF approved funding for 49 grants, spread across every subject area and building.

**After-School Clubs** offer important opportunities for our students to explore new interests, develop leadership skills, and interact with peers in a safe environment. The OEF provided almost \$40,000 in club funding last year.

**OEF Educational Programs** offer a variety of special experiences for Okemos students. Some, like the Elementary Author Visit (in partnership with Horizon Bank) and the Fourth Grade Seeds of Science Field Trips, are annual, beloved programs. Others, like the Chippewa Design Lab, are unique projects sparked by the ingenuity of our faculty.

## HOW WE RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE:

**Okemos Education Foundation Awards:** Formal awards presented at the annual banquet.

**APPLE Awards:** Informal awards that offer recognition for an Amazing Performance in Promoting Learning and Excellence to any staff member and for any reason chosen by the donor. Often used as a public “thank you,” these popular awards both brighten the day of our Okemos staff and contribute to the OEF’s General Fund.

The OEF relies on donations from our community to meet our mission of “recognizing excellence and promoting innovation in Okemos Public Schools.” We appreciate donations of any amount and enjoy recognizing the generosity of our “Partners in Education.” Please consider a donation today. Learn more at [oefsite.org](http://oefsite.org).

**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING OKEMOS STUDENTS!**

# Awards Program

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**SOCIAL HOUR - 5:30 P.M.**

**DINNER - 6:30 P.M.**

## WELCOME

Martha Hentz, OEF Board Chair

## TONIGHT’S MENU:

### Cranberry Port Chicken

*Pan-roasted chicken served with wild rice and walnut pilaf, topped with a cranberry port wine sauce and accompanied by Prince Edward vegetable medley*

### Potato Gnocchi

*Potato pasta tossed with roasted red peppers, asparagus tips, grape tomatoes, broccoli florets, Parmesan cheese and a smoked olive oil drizzle*

**Child Meal - Chicken tenders**

## 2017 AWARDS PROGRAM - 7:30 P.M.

Mark Bashore, Master of Ceremonies

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Alena Zachery-Ross, Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools

## DEAN BOLTON VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD

Ron Styka

## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD

Joel C. Peterson, Class of 1965

## SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

Learning Center Aides at OPM at Central:  
Peggy Baldwin, Krista Grettenberger, Hei-Won Lee  
Sue Tague  
Rhianna Walworth

## COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AWARD

Nicole Langdon, Joel Schut, Robb Shubel, Mark Tomczak, Cindy Wolff

# Keynote Speaker



## ALENA ZACHERY-ROSS

Alena Zachery-Ross, Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools, was formerly the Superintendent of Schools for the Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System, the first public charter school district in the United States, where she served in that role for five years. She is recognized as being responsible for turning around the entire district profile, including student discipline, student and staff attendance, dropout rate, and graduation rate. She previously worked in Van Dyke Public

Schools in Warren, Michigan for nine years where she served as an Assistant Superintendent for curriculum and instruction, elementary school principal, middle school principal, school psychologist and teacher consultant during her tenure there. Previous to working in the Van Dyke Public Schools district, Mrs. Ross was an elementary school teacher and school psychologist for the Detroit Public Schools.

Mrs. Zachery-Ross attended Grand Valley State University, where she received a bachelor's degree with a major in special education/psychology in 1995. She earned her Masters of Arts in education psychology from Wayne State University in 1999. She is pursuing an Ed.D in administration leadership.

As a visionary leader, she possesses extensive experience in leadership development and group collaboration. She is an experienced K-12 school and central office administrator with a comprehensive background in elementary and secondary instruction, curriculum development, communications, multicultural education, school safety, budget and finance, professional learning communities, group facilitation, team building, grant writing, community relations, and data analysis. Mrs. Zachery-Ross continues to be a sought-after speaker, educational consultant and professional developer.

In her spare time, Mrs. Zachery-Ross enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her family.

## Friends continued...

Donald Kulhanek  
Joey Latterman  
Elizabeth Lentz  
Cindy LeVine  
Melanie C. Lynn  
Julie & John MacKenzie  
Martha Marcero & Simon Chow  
Marilyn McCarthy  
The McConnell Family  
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Teresa Tickle Miller  
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Eleanor Omoto  
Amol & Kanchan Pavangadkar  
Gail Peterson  
Monte Aaron Pride  
Lauree Cushion Roney  
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Ethan & Miho Segal  
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William & Connie Clarkson  
Bob Cooley  
Kenneth Cosgrove  
Connie Osborn Deits  
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Matthew Kolstoe  
Melinda Malchock  
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Gunwant K. Sawai  
E. Kathleen (Kay) Weyers

## In Honor Of:

Catherine Ash  
Mrs. Bellamy  
2017 OHS Graduate, Meghan Corbett  
Sheryl Hudler  
Sitakumari Kara  
Karen Sanders  
Pratin Trivedi  
Jessica Warren  
Christine Sermak, Joel Schut, Claire Bellamy,  
& Beth Josephson and all they have  
done in support of Anja Simmons Chivukula.

## In-Kind Donations:

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## About the Awards

### **DEAN BOLTON VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD**

The Dean Bolton Volunteer Service Award honors an individual who has had a significant positive impact on students, staff, and the school community through his/her extraordinary volunteer service.

### **DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD**

The Distinguished Alumni Award honors a graduate of Okemos Public Schools who has demonstrated exceptional dedication and achievement as well as humanitarian contributions.

### **SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD**

The Special Recognition Award is presented to support staff in the district who demonstrate a passion for excellence and whose contributions elevate our schools.

### **COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AWARD**

The OEF's Commitment to Excellence Award recognizes the exceptional and notable service of educational professionals in the Okemos Public School District.

**Each recipient distinguished him or herself in one of the following areas:**

- *Inspiring and motivating students*
- *Promoting the welfare of students*
- *Providing leadership within the school community*
- *Implementing innovative and creative ideas*

**The OEF has bestowed a total of 185 awards since we began recognizing excellence through these formal awards 21 years ago.**

**133 Commitment to Excellence Awards  
33 Special Recognition Awards  
11 Dean Bolton Volunteer Service Awards  
8 Distinguished Alumni Awards**



# Dean Bolton Volunteer Service Award



## RON STYKA

Ron Styka moved to Okemos with his family in 1978. Residents of Briarwood, Ron and his wife, Georgia, have four sons who all attended Okemos Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation from Okemos High School. In 2011, Georgia retired as a history teacher at Okemos High School. Ron has a B.A. in political science, economics, and history from the University of Detroit and a law degree from the University

of Michigan. He served as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Michigan from 1971 until his retirement in December 2010. An active community member, Ron has served as president of Briarwood Association, coached Eastside soccer for nine years, and has been active in OAKS, scouting, Indian Guides, Music Patrons, and Athletic Boosters.

A Knight of Columbus, Ron has served in many elected positions, including Grand Knight. For over 10 years, he has been in charge of the Knights of Columbus' annual fundraising campaign to assist children and adults with mental impairments. He is also active in his church's community outreach activities.

Ron was first elected to the Okemos Board of Education in 1990. He was re-elected in 1994, 1998, 2002, and again in 2006. He also served to fill vacancies on the Board in 2011 and again in 2012. While on the board, Ron served as President (3 years), Vice President (3 years), Treasurer, Secretary (3 years) and Parliamentarian, as well as earning the Michigan Association of School Board's Award of Merit before retiring in December 2010. In November 2012, Ron was elected a Trustee of Meridian Township. In 2016, the voters elevated Ron to the position of Township Supervisor, the chief elected official of Meridian. As part of his duties, Ron is the Township Board's liaison to the school districts within the township, including Okemos. He has served as a Trustee of the Okemos Education Foundation since 2009.

# 2016-2017 OEF DONORS

(7/1/16 through 6/30/17)

The Okemos Education Foundation relies on financial donations in order to fulfill its mission. Thank you to our 2016-2017 Partners in Education for supporting Okemos students!

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## Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient



**JOEL C. PETERSON**  
CLASS OF 1965

Joel Peterson has been on the faculty at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University since 1992, teaching courses in real estate investment, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

Joel is the Chairman of the Board of Overseers at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, as well as the Chairman of the Board at JetBlue Airways. Joel is also the Founding Partner and Chairman of Peterson Partners, a Salt Lake City-based investment management firm with \$1 billion under management. Peterson Partners has invested in over 200 companies through 13 funds in four primary asset classes: growth-oriented private equity, venture capital, real estate, and search funds. Joel is also on the boards of Franklin Covey and Packsize.

Prior to Stanford Business School and founding Peterson Partners, Joel was Chief Executive Officer of Trammell Crow Company, then the world's largest private commercial real estate development firm. Joel earned an MBA from Harvard Business School and received his Bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University, where he was valedictorian and student body president.

# Special Recognition Award Recipients

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## • Learning Center Aides at Okemos Public Montessori at Central



**Krista Grettenberger** is a graduate of Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in Communications. Her background includes work experience in Management and Market Research, as well as a past member of the Junior League of Lansing. Krista has three children and has lived in Okemos for over 25 years. She has worked as a parent volunteer over the years and she is the longest-serving Learning Center aide at Central with 7 years of experience. Krista says "that working in the Learning Center is very rewarding. It is a safe and encouraging place for struggling learners to receive targeted interventions in reading and math. It is very rewarding to watch our students grow academically as well as in their confidence as learners."

**Hei-Won Lee** is a graduate of Middlebury College, where she received a degree in International Politics and Economics and French. Previously she worked in sales and marketing in Boston and Lawrence, Kansas. Her life experience as a parent of two children, member of the District Parent Council, and classroom parent volunteer in the Okemos Public Schools has provided valuable experience to prepare her for work as an at-risk aide. Hei-Won says she enjoys "the energy and enthusiasm of children as well as watching them grow each day." She believes that working in small groups provides her the opportunity to build strong relationships with each of her students in the Learning Center. Hei-Won is entering her fifth year in Central's Learning Center.

**Margaret "Peggy" Baldwin** received her bachelor's degree in elementary and special education from Buffalo State University. She has a master's degree in developmental reading from the University of New York at Albany and a Doctorate in Education from The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. While living in Virginia, Peggy was a classroom teacher for many years and a reading specialist as well as an assistant principal. Peggy and her husband, Roger, moved to Michigan in 2001 when he accepted a position as a professor at Michigan State. Peggy retired in 2013 from Waverly Community Schools after serving as an elementary school principal for twelve years.

The Okemos  
Education Foundation  
thanks Horizon Bank  
for their support of  
the annual Elementary  
Author Visit program

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## Special Recognition Award Recipients



**Sue Tague**

Sue Tague has worked in the Okemos Public Schools for over 10 years, starting out as a volunteer at Cornell Elementary and then as a substitute administrative assistant in various school offices. She has worked full time for the Office of Food & Nutrition since November of 2007. Originally from Wisconsin (GO PACK), Sue moved to Michigan in 1985. She has been married for 32 years and has three children (all of whom went through Okemos K-12), one daughter-in-law and one AMAZING grandson.



**Rhianna Walworth**

Rhianna Walworth began her career with Okemos Public Schools in July 2006 as the Executive Assistant to the Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources. In 2010, while keeping the majority of the human resource responsibilities, she assumed the position of Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and Board of Education. Before coming to Okemos, Rhianna was the Administrative Assistant to the Principal at Perry High School.

Rhianna holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Baker College. She and her husband have two active children; Lola, a fifth grader at Kinawa, and Beckett, a first grader at Okemos Public Montessori at Central. Being their mom is the most rewarding position she's ever held. When she isn't chauffeuring them from one side of the county to the other, Rhianna enjoys all things outdoor rec and fitness. She has participated in everything from marathons and Tough Mudders, to Crossfit competitions. She is also an IKFF Kettlebell Sport National Champion.

Rhianna is proud to have students in the Okemos Public School district, and she considers it a privilege to get to work with its extraordinary staff.

# Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient



## NICOLE LANGDON

Nicole obtained her Bachelor of Science in psychology at Michigan State University. During this time she worked at MSU Safe Place and for the American Red Cross. She then attended Wayne State University for her master's in social work. Her two-year-long practicum experiences were at East Detroit High School and University Middle School in downtown Detroit. In order to pay living expenses, Nicole worked at a youth runaway

facility in Inkster, Michigan, as well as an in-home therapist for a family reunification program.

Nicole was then hired by Swartz Creek Schools as a social worker and enjoyed running Title 1 intervention programs, character programs, and maintaining a caseload. In 2013, Nicole and her family were relocated to Williamston. She was thrilled to see that Okemos had a social work position open as the daily drive was becoming challenging. Nicole was placed at Kinawa Middle School and with the Early Childhood program. Nicole felt right at home with the Okemos team immediately. Each year her students bring her joy in many ways.

In her spare time, Nicole enjoys spending time with family and friends. She loves to golf, cook and relax with her adorable French bulldog. She loves to travel and is happiest playing on the beach with her two children!

# Stars lead the way

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## Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient

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**JOEL SCHUT**

Joel Schut is entering his fifth year working with the Okemos Middle and High School Orchestras. He recently completed his DMA in Orchestral Conducting from Michigan State University. Previous degrees were earned from the University of Colorado-Boulder and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance where he was awarded the Albert A. Stanley Medal, the school's highest honor. In addition to his work in the classroom, Joel has a passion for international education, having taught projects in Honduras, Tunisia, Myanmar, and Afghanistan along with continuing the Okemos Orchestra's beloved Germany Host Family Exchange Program.

Joel is grateful to teach in a district that understands and actively supports the important role the fine arts play in a young person's development. He looks forward to challenging the next generation of artists, thinkers, and changemakers in our community.

**OKEMOS**  
 EDUCATION FOUNDATION

# Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient



## ROBB SHUBEL

Robb Shubel is a proud graduate of Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education as well as a Master of Arts in educational technology.

Robb started his teaching adventure in the Lansing School District teaching fourth and fifth grades for eight years and loved every minute of it! He made the move to Okemos eleven years ago and has been in three different buildings, still teaching fourth and fifth grades. During that time, Robb has met and worked with innumerable amazing colleagues who have helped shape the person and teacher he has become. He is very thankful for their positive influence on his professional and personal life.

Robb's current position at Hiawatha could not be a better fit as he loves teaching fourth grade ... consistently. Also, he and his entire family are currently Hiawatha Hawks! His two children attend school there and his wife Courtney teaches kindergarten. It doesn't get much cozier than that. Robb loves living and working in a community that is so supportive of its schools and employees. He cannot imagine raising a family anywhere else.

In his free time, Robb enjoys spending time with his family (outside of school), going to his children's sporting events, traveling and camping, and working around the house.

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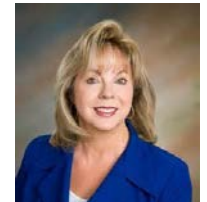


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## Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient



### MARK TOMCZAK

Mark Tomczak attended Michigan State University, where he graduated from the College of Natural Science and the College of Education. He taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade science and coached swimming in Baltimore, Maryland for four years before moving back to Michigan to start working in Okemos. Mark has earned a master's degree in science education and is currently perusing another master's in educational leadership

from Central Michigan University. He is currently the assistant swim coach for the high school boys and girls swim team, runs the middle school swim program, and heads the Science Olympiad at Chippewa.

Mark is extremely appreciate of all of the support the Okemos Public Schools have given him in the short time he has been there and hopes to continue providing the students of the district various opportunities for learning and growth.

# Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient



## CINDY WOLFF

Cindy Wolff earned her bachelor's degree at Michigan State University in elementary education with a major in mathematics and language arts. She has also taken over 30 credits of graduate classes at Michigan State University for continuing education.

Cindy Wolff began her teaching career in the St. Johns Schools where she taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade math and language arts. Cindy later took a position in Okemos Public Schools where she has taught fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade math as well as sixth grade language arts. Currently, at Kinawa, she holds a math teacher's dream job: teaching fifth and sixth grade honors math classes as well as fifth and sixth grade math intervention classes.

Cindy is proud to work in a district that is supportive and always striving for excellence. She loves working alongside intelligent and respectful colleagues and administrators as well as with supportive parents. In her free time, Cindy enjoys spending time with her husband, David, and her college-aged children, Brennan and Myla.

Learn more about the OEF and the support it provides to Okemos students:  
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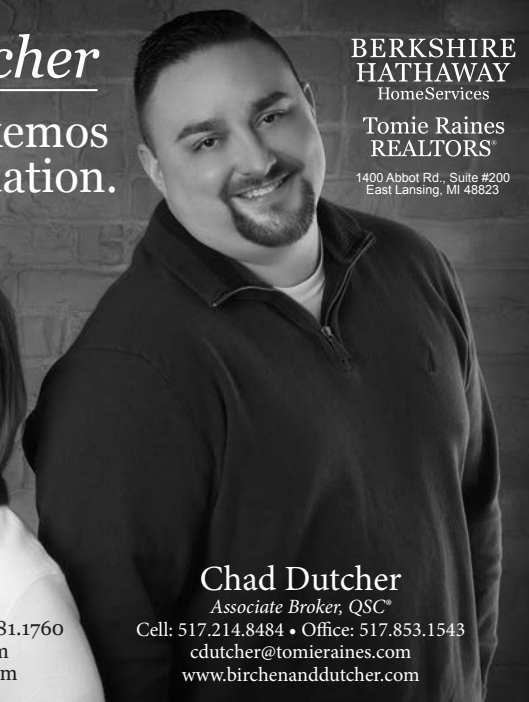
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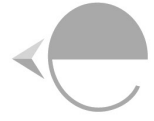
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