

2020

# Encore

The Magazine for Alumni & Friends  
of Bloomfield Hills Schools



**KOBIE  
SOLOMON**

Featured Alumna on Page 14

**BH**  
Bloomfield Hills  
Schools

# CONTENTS

1

Alex Scharg  
Founder of Flow Video

3

Heather Catalo  
Investigative Reporter  
& WXYZ Anchor

4

Brian Wirthlin  
Accounting Entrepreneur  
and Property Developer

7

Josh Grant  
Ophthalmologist

8

Patty Dupuis  
Pilates Instructor

10

Mikaela Schulz  
U of M Golfer

13

Robbie Mullin  
Mother & Actress

14

Kobie Solomon  
Artist

16

Rebecca Abel  
Chef & Restaurateur

18

Mark Honeyman  
Retired Teacher

20

Diana Campbell  
Retired Teacher

22

Dennis Kwasny  
Retired Teacher

24

Karen  
Swisher-McKee  
Author

26

Compass Fund  
Supporting Mental Health

29

Valerie  
Brennecke  
Teacher

30

Samer  
Alsayed Suliman  
Field Technology Manager

32

Laura Kesner  
Teacher

33

Liza Lauter  
Teacher

34

Alan Posner  
Band Director

36

Laura Bushon  
Teacher

## FROM THE DESK OF *ENCORE*



*Encore* is published by Bloomfield Hills Schools to keep alumni and friends informed. Learn about alumni and find out about the latest school news.

You could be included in a future issue of *Encore*! Tell us your memories, awards, adventures, startup companies, or business successes. Please contact [communications@bloomfield.org](mailto:communications@bloomfield.org) with your story!

# Alex Scharg

Scharg is the founder of the video marketing company, Flow Video. Scharg's team has created videos featuring Bloomfield Hills Schools.



## WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE EXPERIENCE AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL STUDENT?

One of my favorite experiences at Andover was the international food day festival. One day each year, all of the language classes prepared delicacies from their native countries for students to try. It was nice to have an authentic, worldly experience (shout-out to my Spanish teachers Mrs. Vennettilli and Mrs. Toma!). Another fabulous experience I had was taking choir with Bruce Snyder. We had the opportunity to sing with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in its annual 'Home for the Holidays' concert. And finally, the Lahser and Andover rivalry was always a good one – especially from someone who was a point guard bringing the ball up the court.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU LEARNED AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?

Always try your absolute best, because you never know who is listening! Snyder, the choir director, and Champion, the theatre director at Andover, stressed that someone is always watching, and you never know what doing the right thing can lead to. It wasn't until I went to college that I was able to see how this lesson paid off. I auditioned as a sophomore for the sports talk radio show for the on-campus student radio station. After I was chosen to be the host, I was called in by the station manager because the Director of WKAR-TV/AM, Gary Reid, wanted to meet with me. It turned out that Gary listened to my radio takes, and he had a connection to the WBFH station head Pete Bowers. It was who I knew that got me in the door, but then it was what I knew when I got there. That was my start in the industry that launched many other career opportunities; it all came from the mentality of 'you never know who is listening.'

## WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO CREATE YOUR COMPANY?

While at MSU's student radio station, I met a talented videographer named Scott Wasserman. We had an instant connection and began collaborating on different projects. I was the storytelling, journalism side and he was the technical, video side. Now, entering year four, we've become a video marketing agency with clients including Big Ten Universities, schools, auto suppliers, and a billion-dollar bank. We recently flew to Geneva, Switzerland to film the UN Geneva Summit for an advocacy group.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?

Try as many experiences as you can as a student, so you can learn more about yourself and your mission. Always say 'yes.' I didn't pick up WBFH radio until I was a junior in high school, and that ended up being the perfect combination of my love of the arts and athletics. You never know what activity or subject may strike a chord in you.



You can read the full version of Scharg's interview at [www.bloomfield.org/alumni](http://www.bloomfield.org/alumni) along with other great stories and news updates for and about Bloomfield Hills Schools Alumni.



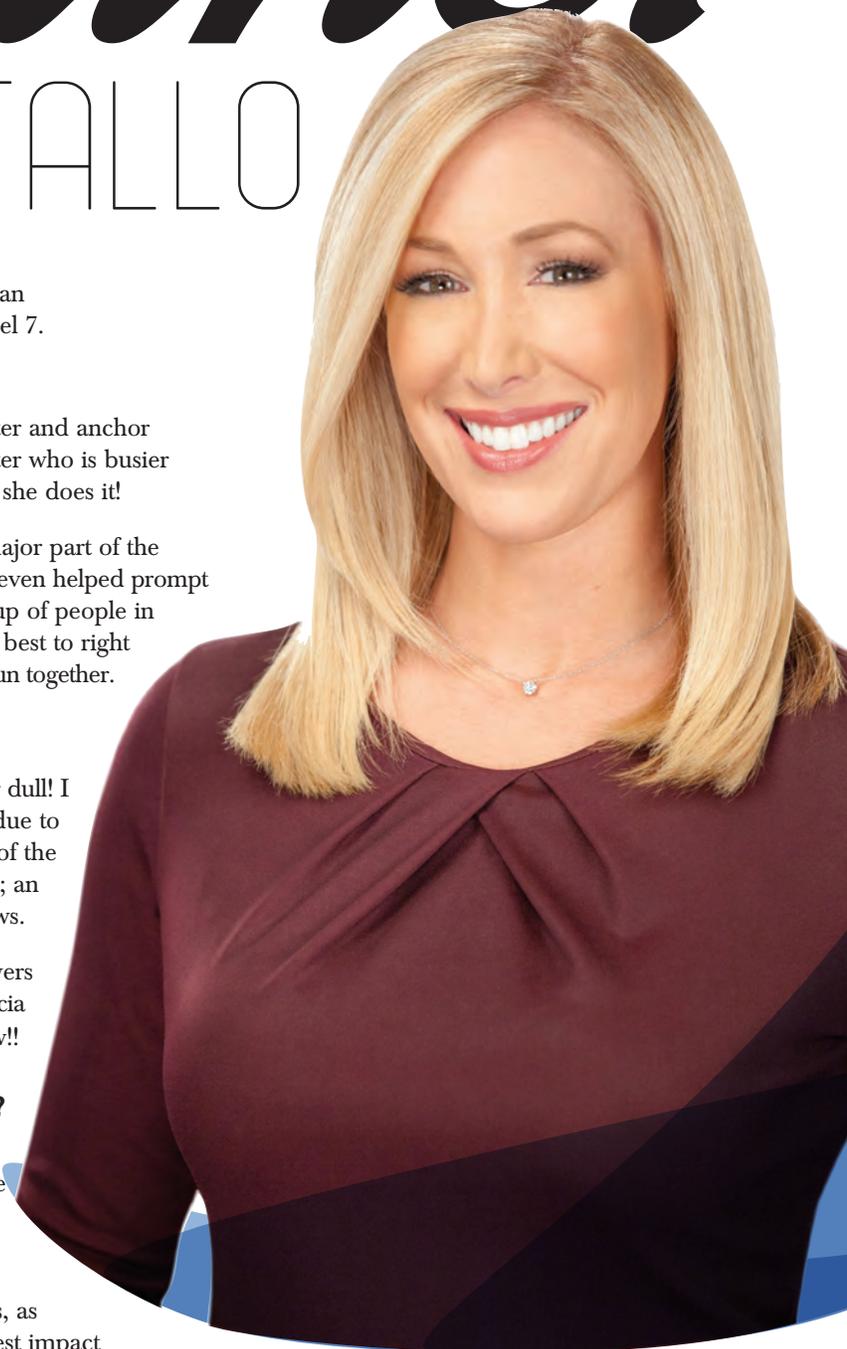
# BACK IN BLOOMFIELD

*Alumni Who Are  
Back in Town*



# Heather

CATALLO



A 1994 graduate of Bloomfield Hills Schools, Catallo is an investigative reporter and anchor for WXYZ-TV Channel 7.

## **TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.**

When I'm not breaking stories as an investigative reporter and anchor for WXYZ-TV Channel 7, I spend time with my daughter who is busier than I am with swim team, dance, music, you name it – she does it!

As far as work goes, I love helping people, which is a major part of the investigative work that we do. Some of my recent stories even helped prompt a change to Michigan law. I work with a wonderful group of people in our investigative unit: We spend a lot of time doing our best to right wrongs and expose corruption, and we also have a lot of fun together.

## **WHAT DID YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT BHS?**

I loved all of our crazy times at WBFH-FM – it was never dull! I gained so much confidence during my time at Andover due to experiences with Forensics, the radio station, and in all of the theater productions. Those days taught me to improvise; an essential skill for a reporter who deals with breaking news.

I had some incredible teachers over the years: Pete Bowers (AHS), Lori Kontry (BHMS), Ted Gardella (BHMS), Patricia Clees (AHS), Mark Honeyman (AHS), just to name a few!!

## **WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST?**

I think in this era of allegations of 'fake news' and partisan-leaning national cable news, local news has a unique opportunity to continue to be truth-tellers and to hold the powerful accountable. We have done that with our local and state leaders in the past, and we will continue to do that. It's your local school boards, judges, as well as city and county leaders that likely have the biggest impact on your life. We serve as a check and balance to their power, and we take that responsibility very seriously. As journalists, we are more committed than ever to being transparent and showing the public that when questions need to be asked, we will ask them in a fair and factual way.

## **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?**

There is no set path; dream big, plan well, but be willing to take the curve in the road – you never know where you might end up!



*All 17 of the Wirthlin children graduated from Andover High School.*

**“WE GROW THE  
MAMMOTH GREY  
SUNFLOWER...  
AS YOU WALK  
ALONG THE ROWS  
OF BEAUTIFUL  
SUNFLOWERS,  
YOU CAN HEAR  
THE HUMMING  
OF THE BEES.”**



# BRYAN WIRTHLIN

A 1983 Andover Graduate, Wirthlin is an accounting entrepreneur and property developer.

## WHEN DID YOU MOVE BACK TO BLOOMFIELD AND WHY?

I have five children, Mimi 14, Nicholas 16, Heidi 20, Scotty 22, and Sarah 24 with my wife, Kristina. We moved back to Bloomfield Hills in 1998 near Lahser shortly after Scotty was born. Prior to that, we lived in London, England and New York City. My three older children attended Hickory Grove, then East Hills; Nick and Mimi attended Way, then BHMS, and now they are at BHHS.

I own a company called SandPoint Consulting. We are a SAP software implementer, which means we help large organizations implement accounting systems that help them with their financial reporting, budgeting, monthly consolidations, and financial analysis.

The other company I own is Bees and Trees, LLC, which is a property management company. We have a 75-acre farm in Northville - no livestock, since we don't live there. We just finished planting 750 Christmas trees; each are about 4 years old. We plant the Mammoth Grey Sunflower which grow to 9-12 feet in height. As you walk along the rows of beautiful sunflowers, you can hear the humming of the bees. We have between 2 and 5 bee hives that my family manages. My daughters Mimi and Heidi love suiting up and getting the smoker out to harvest the honey. We inspect the bees and look for the queen to make sure they are healthy. It is a lot fun.

I started buying homes in Pontiac about 5 years ago and fix them up with my son, Scotty. We buy the homes from the

county just before they are about to be leveled. We bring them up to code and then sell them to families. More recently one of the homes we purchased is somewhat of a historical home, and we spent quite a bit of time and money restoring it. A couple weeks after we sold it, we saw the City of Pontiac gave the home the 'Pride & Beautification 2019 Award.'

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PAST TIME?

I started playing beginner, adult hockey for the exercise and to try something new. The league I play on is called the BAD league which stands for Beginner Adult Division in Farmington Hills. I play with my son, Scotty and my son-in-law, Blake. We have a blast!

Also, I enjoy spending time on the farm with family and friends. We have snowmobiles, four wheelers, dirt bikes, and go-carts. I am one of the scout leaders for Nick's troop. At the farm we can enjoy camping and a lot of activities that don't cost the troop any money. We have a big knife-throwing wall, and a blacksmith forge and anvil for making knives. Also, we have some antique saws for cutting wood as they did at the turn of the century.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?

I have a lot of great memories. One funny memory is when I played on the basketball team. I hit a half-court buzzer-beater playing against Ferndale, and Coach Whalen said, "I'm glad Wirthlin said some prayers today." Everyone was shocked and it was a big win.



Another funny story is when I played football, I was hyperventilating and they had to bring the ambulance out to the field. My dad was our team doctor, and the paramedics were about to wheel me into the ambulance, when my dad asked, "How much is this going to cost me?" When they told him \$500, he intercepted and drove me to the hospital instead. I was okay and everything worked out; we get a chuckle from it today.

**WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU LEARNED AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?**

Bloomfield offered something for everyone, very much like they do now. An important lesson I learned is to be active and try new things. I played football, basketball, in the orchestra, and ran track. Music is so important! I play the guitar and the piano which I try to do every night. It all stems from my time as a student at BHMS. The fine and performing arts have always been valued in this district. When I was a junior, in 1982, Andover built a state-of-the-art auditorium which I got to enjoy for my senior year. The auditorium at the new high school is even more impressive. Bloomfield Hills Schools taught the whole person: body, mind, heart, and spirit.

**WAS THERE ANYONE IN BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS WHO INFLUENCED WHAT YOU ARE DOING NOW?**

Many of my coaches such as Frank Buford, Roger Zwijack, Mike Lane, Robert Hurdle, to name a few, taught me

the lessons of being competitive, working toward goals, giving your best, and valuing fellow teammates. We didn't have the best sports teams, but the coaches were very positive and instilled the value of not giving up. All very good character-building traits that I draw from today.

**WHAT DID YOU DO FOR THE COMMUNITY?**

My seven brothers and I achieved Eagle Scout rank. Scouting was an important part of my youth; being a good steward of the environment and giving back to the community. My son, Nick, built picnic tables for Oakland Family Services in Pontiac for his Eagle project. My son, Scott, rebuilt the Bowers School Farm's handicap ramp for his Eagle project.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS?**

I think it is so important to stay connected to the folks of your childhood. Pick good friends and form meaningful relationships. Scott Sugg, teacher at BHMS, graduated the same year as I did, but from Lahser, so we competed against each other. Scott coached my youngest brother in football and taught my younger children at BHMS. At Mimi's 8th grade recognition ceremony he reinforced the importance of picking good friends, and I totally agree.



# JOSH GRANT

A 2000 graduate of Bloomfield Hills Schools, Josh is an ophthalmologist raising his family in the same neighborhood in which he grew up.



## WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY OF BEING A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS STUDENT?

My favorite memory, without a doubt, is the day I met my wife, Maran, while riding home on the Andover school bus. I had never been on the bus before, but I found myself as a first-time bus rider after a transportation issue in October of my sophomore year. Jokingly, I proposed to the girl sitting behind me on that first bus ride. Twenty years later, we are happily married with two beautiful daughters, Allison and Emma, and we live on the street where the bus dropped us off that day!

While the day that I met my wife is my favorite memory, there are countless other memories that come to mind when thinking about my experience at Andover. Notably, I have very fond memories of how close-knit our class was. We had a small high school class, and many of us are still close to this day. I think it was really incredible that we had such a supportive and kind group of kids in the class of 2000, and it's no surprise that so many of them have become successful in their respective fields.

Work hard, show kindness to others, and don't be afraid to fail. Having such an amazing group of supportive teachers and classmates allowed us to take risks, and there was never a fear of failure or ridicule.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS YOU LEARNED AT BHS?

Work hard, show kindness to others, and don't be afraid to fail. Having such an amazing group of supportive teachers and classmates allowed us to take risks, and there was never a fear of failure or ridicule.

**“WORK HARD, FIND SOMETHING YOU'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT, AND ALWAYS SHOW KINDNESS.”**

## TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

I am a 35-year-old ophthalmologist and ocular trauma surgeon living in West Bloomfield. I love what I do for work. As an ophthalmologist, I have the opportunity to help patients at risk of permanent vision loss on a daily basis. I feel very fortunate to be able to have that type of impact on people everyday.

After graduating from Andover, I studied biology at University of Michigan, and later attended Wayne State University School of Medicine. Following medical school, I completed an internship in internal medicine and an ophthalmology residency at University of South Florida. Later, I completed a retina fellowship at University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center. After completing my training, I opened an ophthalmology practice in Bloomfield Hills.

## DO YOU STILL DRAW UPON YOUR BHS EXPERIENCE TODAY?

I draw on my experience at Andover on a daily basis. Having two kids at home, both of whom will be attending Bloomfield Hills Schools, I try to be as patient with them as my teachers and mentors at Andover were with me.

## IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE?

There are more people that I admire than I can name here. My father, Steven Grant, is at the top of that list. He is an amazing physician, father, and husband. I can't imagine a better role model to emulate.

## IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY EXCITED ABOUT?

On a personal level, I can't wait to see my daughters grow up and experience what life has to offer. From a professional standpoint, I am excited to learn what the future holds with regard to new medical therapies and surgical approaches to combat blindness.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?

Work hard, find something you're passionate about, and always show kindness. Hard work and kindness, both of which I learned about first-hand at Andover, are crucial in any success story.



# PATTY DUPUIS

A Lahser graduate of 2002, Dupuis is a Pilates instructor in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and lives locally.

## TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

I studied psychology at Miami University and eventually went back to school for elementary education before deciding to make a career in fitness. I've been teaching Pilates for five years now and truly enjoy it. Favorite pastimes include reading, exercising, napping, gardening, Netflix binging, and walking my dog around Cranbrook. We go up there several times a week when it's nice outside.

**"ENJOY IT  
WITH BALANCE!  
STUDY HARD,  
HAVE FUN,  
AND VALUE  
GOOD FRIENDS."**



**WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES OR EXPERIENCES THAT YOU HAD AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL STUDENT?**

I have so many! Field Days at Hickory Grove, sledding down the hill during winter, and the fourth grade trip to Camp Tamarack stand out from elementary school. I also loved all things Lahser Homecoming and have a lot of happy memories of float building, pep assemblies, the game, and the dance! I think I still have the spirit week class shirts from each year tucked away in a box of memories.

**WAS THERE ANYONE OR ANYTHING IN BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS THAT INFLUENCED WHAT YOU ARE DOING NOW?**

I often think about my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Perry. I was very shy growing up, and I still recall how she made me feel during our year-end celebration. She recognized and gave a little gift to each of us. My gift was a tiny flashlight because just like my smile, it could light up a room when it was turned on. That gave me confidence to start slowly coming out of my shell. Now you'd never believe I was ever painfully shy!

**WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A PILATES INSTRUCTOR?**

My sister inspired me to become an instructor. She opened a studio in the area and I immediately fell in love with the workouts, the atmosphere, and the community of supportive, positive women. I found myself always wanting to be there, so I decided to make it a career!

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT TEACHING PILATES?**

My favorite thing about teaching Pilates is seeing the physical and mental impact it can make in a person's life. I love building relationships and celebrating the little things - like a client being able to easily stand up from the floor after playing with her grandson. Also, it makes me so happy when people tell me that coming to class is a bright spot / their one hour of me time in an otherwise hectic day.

**WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

I just love the idea that anything is possible. I was wildly unathletic growing up, disliked sports, and did everything I could to get out of participating in gym class. I never would have guessed I'd become a fitness instructor. Now, I'm forever studying new subjects and seeking out ways to foster personal and professional growth, and it's exciting to consider what unexpected paths my knowledge and experiences might lead me down!

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?**

Enjoy it with balance! Study hard, have fun, and value good friends. Those relationships are ones that you can build upon and carry with you for life.



# MIKAELA SCHULZ

Mikaela Schulz is 2019 graduate of BHHS and is a current student-athlete at University of Michigan.

## SHARE A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

I have always been very close to my family, and I love only being an hour away from home while at college. I have one sister, Kendall, two loving parents, and a brand new puppy named Stella! Besides playing golf, I enjoy making ceramic pieces on the wheel and practicing yoga. My love for pottery started my senior year of high school when I took the ceramics class offered at Bloomfield Hills High School. Mr. Beauchamp helped me discover and develop my skill of throwing on the potters wheel. I am very passionate about helping others and doing what I can to make the world a better place. I have been fundraising to help find a cure for Type 1 diabetes for 10 years now and I have been involved in numerous community service projects throughout my life. I know I want to continue to make a difference in my community and in the world.

**“I KNOW I WANT  
TO CONTINUE  
TO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE IN  
MY COMMUNITY  
AND IN THE  
WORLD.”**



## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE SO FAR?

I am enjoying attending the University of Michigan. The academics are amazing, and it is incredible being a part of the golf team. I have adjusted well and am achieving success both academically and on the golf course. Bloomfield Hills High School was instrumental in preparing me for the challenges. Golf is such an individual sport, but I have enjoyed bonding with my teammates and coaches. Both of my coaches are supportive and helpful, and it is incredible to be surrounded by a group of people who want to help you improve and see you succeed. The University of Michigan also does a fabulous job of supporting student athletes as they understand the rigorous demands both academically and athletically.

## HOW DID YOU BECOME SO INVOLVED - AND TALENTED - AT GOLF?

My papa (my mom's father) helped coach two professional athletes: his son Aaron Krickstein (a professional tennis player) and his granddaughter Morgan Pressel (a professional golfer). When I was younger, my papa would take me to the driving range once a year to hit golf balls. I began competing at age nine and fell in love with the sport. From a young age, I wanted to play on the LPGA tour like my cousin. Unlike Morgan, I did not have much natural talent or skill. My hard work, obsession with improvement, and my amazing support system of family, friends and coaches have helped me develop into the player I am today.

## WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS STUDENT?

I made so many long-lasting memories at Bloomfield Hills High School. Some that stick out to me the most are going to states with the golf team all 4 years, spirit weeks, the Black Hawk games, and the experiences from my freshmen social studies class. Mr. Jenvy was the teacher, and we did everything from reenacting trench warfare to imagining there was an apocalypse and having the students work together to sustain order within the classroom. I also enjoyed completing my personal project during my sophomore year. This project helped me realize the impact I could have on my community, despite my age.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU LEARNED FROM BEING AT BLOOMFIELD SCHOOLS?

The most important things I learned from attending Bloomfield Hills High School are time management and the importance of community and teamwork. Balancing golf and school is not an easy task and did not get any easier transitioning from high school to college. However, the opportunities Bloomfield Hills High School provided me both on the golf team and by allowing me to have a flexible schedule helped me learn how to better manage these two important aspects of my life. My education at Bloomfield Hills High School definitely helped prepare me for college.



.....

The skill of being able to work well in a team environment and be a team player is something I learned from being a part of the high school's golf team. Before high school, golf was always an individual sport for me. In competitions, I would be competing for myself, and I would always practice by myself. The high school golf team was my first experience playing golf with a team, and the teamwork skills I learned from this experience is definitely a skill I deeply value now, as a part of the University of Michigan golf team.

**WAS THERE ANYONE IN BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS THAT INFLUENCED WHAT YOU ARE DOING NOW?**

My success in golf and in school is due to the amazing teachers I had at Bloomfield Hills High School. The support of my teachers helped me gain confidence in my academic abilities, which enables me to navigate the challenges of college better. The positive relationships I developed with my Bloomfield Hills teachers also helped me be comfortable with approaching my graduate student instructors and my professors, even at a large university like Michigan. Additionally, the unique electives offered at Bloomfield Hills High School helped me explore a variety of fields and begin finding my interests.

**IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE?**

I admire several people for differing reasons. I admire Tiger Woods for his work ethic, determination, and amazing golf skills and accomplishments. I also admire coach Brendan Harrington for his commitment to improving junior golf by coaching the Bloomfield Hills High School girls varsity golf team. He has

helped the program grow and develop over the years, all while raising a family of his own. He is an amazing person and so incredibly supportive. Lastly, I admire my papa. He is a wise man, and still has an incredible sense of humor although he is battling Parkinson's disease. I love spending time with him, and he has instilled the importance of family in me.

**IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY EXCITED ABOUT FOR YOUR FUTURE?**

I am looking forward to the spring golf season at the University of Michigan. We are traveling to some cool places like Mexico, and I am also excited for our training trip to Florida. Looking more into the future, I am looking forward to continuing to explore my academic interests at the university. Also, I am hoping to develop my golf game to the point where after college I can be competitive on the LPGA tour.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO CURRENT BHHS STUDENTS?**

My advice would be for students to always work hard and try their best in everything they do. Also, to know that they can achieve anything that they set their mind to. It is important they know the teachers at the high school are there to help and support them. I remain in contact with some of my teachers and truly value these relationships. It's crucial to explore various interests and learn how to manage time well during high school. The high school has a lot to offer; make sure you take advantage of its resources and the opportunities it provides.





# ROBBIE MULLIN

An Andover graduate of the Class of 1998, Robbie Mullin is raising her family in Bloomfield Hills after being in the acting industry.

### TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF!

I am an ex-actress who trained in NYC and Los Angeles. After years of training and working professionally, I was done with the industry and decided to go into theatre education. I married a wonderful man in the Navy which led us to Connecticut. When our first child was born, we really wanted to be closer to home. My husband separated from the military, and we moved back to Bloomfield Hills. It is awesome knowing that my children will be graduating from the very same district that I did!

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PAST-TIME?

Hanging out at the Village Place (now called Village Palace) restaurant in West Bloomfield on the weekends.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL STUDENT?

My best memory was writing, producing, and directing a play for a Model High School class. With the permission of teacher Mary Bogrette, I was able to cast the 8th graders from BHMS and direct them on the BHMS stage. It was my first experience for me to really begin my journey in my career of acting and directing professionally. That was an example of using the time

that you were given to work towards your dream. I am so thankful that they allowed me to do that.

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU LEARNED FROM BEING AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?

The most important skill I learned from Bloomfield Hills Schools was that I had something to contribute in this world. I had a voice and a place in society.

### WAS THERE ANYONE IN BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS THAT INFLUENCED WHAT YOU ARE DOING NOW?

I was greatly influenced by Mary Bogrette and Bill Boyle. Mary is the reason I went off to New York City and studied theatre and film the way I did. Bill Boyle helped me find my own voice and advocate for myself. Both will always hold a place in my heart for that.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO FOR WORK OR FOR THE COMMUNITY?

I love to inspire young kids and teenagers. I want them to know they have a voice. I love to find the inner strength in a student or child and make them see what they can contribute. I love teaching and helping kids see they can learn while having fun.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO CURRENT STUDENTS?

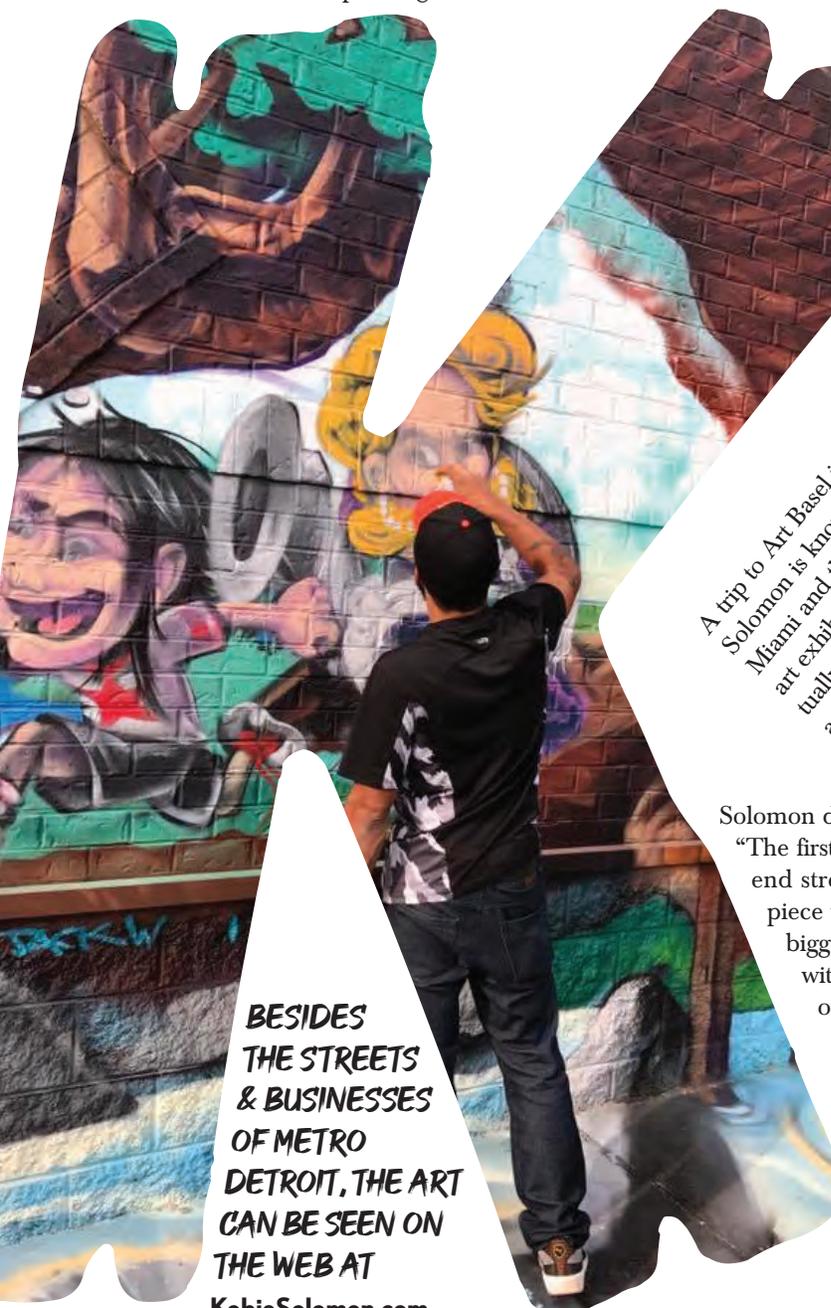
My advice is to travel a lot or move away from Bloomfield for at least a year. I know that isn't possible for everyone to do, but I think that if you can, it is a good idea. Therefore, you can gain your independence and surround yourself with different groups of friends with different backgrounds. Get to know all walks of life and put yourself in people's shoes. Know that there is a world out there beyond this wonderful city. Come back with enough life lessons, experiences, ideas, perspectives, and stories to pass on to your own children.

### IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE EXCITED ABOUT FOR YOUR FUTURE?

I am excited to see my kids grow and learn in this community. What a great place to be raised!

Been to the Morrie in Royal Oak lately? Or Otus Supply in Ferndale? Maybe Detroit Eastern Market's "Murals in the Market" which the Smithsonian designated as one of the top five mural festivals in the world? If so, you've likely seen work by Kobie Solomon, a mixed media artist who is internationally known for large, colorful street art murals. Solomon graduated in 1995 from Bloomfield Hills Schools (Lahser), promptly moved to the city of Detroit, and says the world has been expanding ever since.

"I graduated when I was 17," explains Solomon. "I actually left early, and I did not have any kind of idea about how big the world of art was when I was in high school. I loved making art, but I was abysmally ignorant of what was out there. What I was making in high school was limited to my awareness and interests. I wasn't trying to expand and experiment with paint and with colors until after I got to college at the Center for Creative Studies. My classes there were in the same vein, 2D, but my focus was more on illustration and fine art."



A trip to Art Basel in Miami was a launchpad for the huge murals Solomon is known for producing. Solomon explains, "Art Basel Miami and the Wynwood Walls started off as an annual city-wide art exhibition. Because there were so many artists down there, eventually street artists started going. You can't put a bunch of graffiti artists together and not expect them to go out and start tagging stuff, especially when you are talking about the best of the best in the world. They're going to go out, and they're going to interact and be painting. As a result of that side project, this thing called Wynwood Walls came about which is the great-grandfather of every mural festival that has been happening, especially in Detroit. There would be no Murals in the Market festival without Wynwood Walls. The fact that street art even exists in Detroit is absolutely, 100 percent connected to Wynwood Walls and Art Basel."

Solomon did four years of projects at Wynwood Walls, saying, "The first year was a straight up piece of graffiti, really high-end street art. The second year I did a really big production piece with one of the members of MSK, which is one of the biggest graffiti crews in the world. The third year, I went down with a couple of Detroit artists, and we did a collaboration on the wall. The fourth year, I did a huge character."

Still, Solomon remains a local artist, with a residence and studio in Pontiac, a beautiful and inspirational daughter, and an appreciation for Bloomfield Hills Schools roots.

**BESIDES  
THE STREETS  
& BUSINESSES  
OF METRO  
DETROIT, THE ART  
CAN BE SEEN ON  
THE WEB AT**

**KobieSolomon.com**

**OR ON INSTAGRAM AT @kobiesolomon\_official**

**HIS MERCHANDISE IS SOLD AT  
society6.com/mojocityexports1**

# KOBIE SOLOMON

Solomon took 2D art classes like painting and drawing in high school, unapologetically “a huge comics nerd” at the time. Solomon has fond memories of teacher Norm Stewart, for both the most negative and most positive experience in high school. “I was a troubled student, and that’s no mystery,” Solomon discloses. “I was a pain for a lot of people. Mr. Stewart had a supply closet in the classroom. And I would tear through magic rub erasers constantly because I was always using pencils for all my drawings, and magic rubs were the best erasers.

**“WELL, I PILFERED AN ENTIRE BOX OF MAGIC RUBS OUT OF THE SUPPLY CLOSET. NORM FOUND OUT ABOUT IT AND KICKED ME OUT OF THE ART DEPARTMENT. SO, THERE WAS A SEMESTER OF ME THINKING ABOUT IT AND REALIZING THAT WAS REALLY STUPID BECAUSE HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE GIVEN ME A HANDFUL IF I HAD ASKED FOR THEM. LOOK, I’M A SCREW UP. OUTSIDE OF ART I DIDN’T HAVE A FUTURE...AND I KNEW IT. SO, I WENT BACK, AND I ASKED HIM IF HE WOULD LET ME BACK IN. AND NORM FORGAVE ME AND LET ME BACK INTO THE ART DEPARTMENT.”**

Today, Solomon focuses on murals or large installation work, but also does conceptual illustrations, comic illustrations, and graphic design. The Photoshop creative suite is the starting point for a lot of design work, but Solomon doesn’t do 3D graphics or motion art. “I enjoy doing large format work a lot more than smaller stuff. There’s a physicality to the large work that does not exist with a smaller work. I’m able to put on music and really tune out when I’m focusing on a large piece.”

The production process for a large art piece is something of a mystery for non-artists, but to Solomon, it’s a normal part of being. “Let’s say you are working on a smaller painting,” Solomon explains, “something that let’s say is the size of a sheet of letter paper. Even though you are working on a smaller section of the drawing, your mind is picking up the total. Because it’s smaller, your subconscious and even your direct conscious is more or less aware of the whole. When you start working on really, really big stuff, what ends up happening is that part of your mind expands to accommodate the fact that you are working with a larger space. Even though you are working on a very small area, your mind is aware of the whole while you are working on that small section. It’s like your whole body becomes your hand, and it’s almost like there’s an eye floating out behind you.”

For today’s artists, social media has changed everything. “Once upon a time, hype had something to do with an artist’s success

but it was not nearly a big of a part,” says Solomon. “Overnight, you can become world famous because of a painting and because of a share by the right person or props by the right person or people. It was not like that when I started at all.”

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 37**





# REBECCA

# ABEL

Rebecca Abel is a 1996 graduate of Bloomfield Hills Schools and a local entrepreneur. Abel's newest businesses, Treat Dreams Dessert Emporium and D'VINE Cookies in Ferndale, provide scrumptious treats!





**TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.**

I am a mother of two boys, ages 10 and 13, and have two businesses that I'm working on: D'VINE Cookies and Treat Dreams Dessert Emporium.

I have been a financial planner for 20 years with a special focus on divorce. Through that I have had a lot of community involvement. In 2012 I co-founded the Women's Divorce Resource Center, a non-profit business educating and empowering women during divorce.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TYPE OF D'VINE COOKIE?**

My favorite cookie is the chocolate chip. I love a cookie with a lot of chocolate that is crunchy on the outside and gooey on the inside. That's how we make all our cookies.

Treat Dreams Dessert Emporium, in Ferndale, is a collaboration between D'VINE cookies and Treat Dreams ice cream. We partnered to create the ultimate dessert cafe, featuring the most decadent desserts we could dream up including 14-layer cakes, 5-pound ice cream sandwiches and Dream sundaes that are as big as a bowling ball.

**WHEN DID YOU FIRST TRY BAKING?**

I enjoyed baking a little as a kid, more because I loved eating sweets. I really hadn't baked much at all since then, until I started to toy with the idea of creating a cookie company. I needed to teach myself, so I googled my way through learning to make a great cookie.

**WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?**

In my spare time, which is not much these days, I enjoy running, skiing, boating, going up north, and just being outside.

**WHAT DID YOU ENJOY AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS STUDENT?**

My favorite memories really involved the teams I was a part of. One year, our cross country team won regionals! It was very exciting.

I loved being involved in sports at Andover. I was a four year track and cross country runner and captain for the cross country team my senior year. I have great memories of my coaches and team members.

**WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS THAT YOU LEARNED?**

Bloomfield Hills Schools had a large pool of really talented and intelligent students. I learned that it was important to figure out what my strengths were and to focus on those.

**DO YOU STILL DRAW UPON YOUR BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL EXPERIENCE TODAY?**

I had to work really hard to do well at Andover. I learned great study skills and had great teachers who helped me learn how to learn.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?**

Follow your dreams, believe in yourself, and be creative!

**“FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS,  
BELIEVE IN YOURSELF,  
AND BE CREATIVE!”**





# BHS RETIREE SPOTLIGHTS

## MARK HONEYMAN

**NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING IN BHS:**  
35

**SCHOOLS/GRADES/SUBJECTS TAUGHT:**  
I spent 10 years at Andover, where I taught 9th and 10th grade language arts, music theater, acting, debate, and stagecraft; 25 years at West Hills, where I taught 7th grade language arts and social studies, 7th and 8th grade choir, and 8th grade language arts.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM TEACHING?**

This question is like asking a parent to tell you which of their children is their favorite! My favorite moments are every time a student trusted me with a personal concern or trusted me enough to take a risk in my classroom by asking questions or making themselves vulnerable in some way. The profound beauty of that kind of trust and that sort of

risk taking moved me deeply from the very beginning of my career until my last day as an educator. Ironically, the most intensely moving experience I had as an educator was my last. Unknown to me, a former student of mine who is now a teacher herself, organized a reunion of former students of mine who flew in from literally across the country, including California, Connecticut, Colorado, Tennessee, and Georgia, among others. They suddenly appeared in my classroom unannounced on my second to last day as a teacher, and then we had dinner together the following day after I turned my lights out in my classroom for the last time. I will never be able to adequately express how much it meant to me to have so many of my former students, many of whom have gone on to become educators themselves, travel to be with me to recognize my impact on them as an educator.

**ARE STUDENTS AND TEACHING DIFFERENT NOW FROM WHEN YOU STARTED YOUR TEACHING CAREER?**

I have often been asked this question. There are certainly differences in personal style, musical tastes, etc. that have evolved in the 35 years I was a teacher. But fundamentally, students haven't changed at all. They still yearn for acceptance; they still struggle to find their place in the world; they still want to understand the way the world works; they still want to know that someone is listening.

**WHAT WILL YOU MISS THE MOST ABOUT TEACHING?**

The chance to make a difference in the lives of children. I felt the precious and exhilarating weight of that responsibility on my shoulders every single day, and I cherished it.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST, NOW THAT YOU ARE RETIRED? WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?**

The most exciting avenue that I am looking forward to pursuing is getting to know my siblings. I discovered last

January that I have 7 siblings that I never knew I had (and 37 nieces and nephews, I might add!). We had our first meeting during spring break in 2019, and it was nothing short of magical. I can't wait to get together again and deepen our relationship. I have 58 years to make up for! My students have suggested that I write a book about my teaching experiences as well as the discovery of my newfound family. I have to admit, I am considering the idea!

**DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ALUMNI WHO ARE EDUCATORS OR ARE THINKING ABOUT CAREERS IN EDUCATION?**

I know these are tough times to be an educator, for a host of different reasons. But ultimately, we as teachers have the opportunity to shape the future, to touch the lives of students who need our expertise and our guidance and our unconditional love and support. I can't imagine a more important role to play, and I pray that those who are in the profession stick with it, and those who are considering the profession take a hold of it and make their mark. I know there are challenges ahead, but how can we make things better if we abandon what I consider the most noble profession on the face of the planet? Raise your voices and work for positive change, but stay the course!

**IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO YOUR FORMER STUDENTS?**

I love you. Everything else is superfluous.



.....

# DIANA CAMPBELL

## **NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING IN BHS:**

30 (plus one year of subbing, and half-year as a para)

## **SCHOOLS/GRADES/SUBJECTS TAUGHT:**

I taught a first/second multi-age (split) class, first grade, and Reading Recovery/first grade at Hickory Grove and Eastover Elementary Schools

## **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM TEACHING?**

Celebrating a principal's milestone birthday as an entire school; celebrating Blue Ribbon designation; meeting together as a former staff to honor our time at Hickory Grove before the building was demolished; the life-long friendships I have developed with colleagues; seeing a child's face light up when they finally "got it"; any time a former student returned to tell me how being their teacher influenced her/him; success stories with struggling students who overcame their fears, shyness, behavioral difficulties, or learning/reading roadblocks.

## **ARE STUDENTS AND TEACHING DIFFERENT NOW FROM WHEN YOU STARTED YOUR TEACHING CAREER?**

Students are much more tech-savvy and love to share that knowledge with each other and their teachers. They are used to fast-paced media, so I found it was more important to include more activity and "entertainment" in my teaching (puppets, singing, movement, storytelling, dancing, teaching videos, and excited character voices as I read out loud) in my last 10 years of teaching. I wholeheartedly believe that all of this made me a much better, more reflective, and effective teacher.

Kids' attention spans seem shorter in the last decade, so time spent teaching needed to be more exact, engaging, and motivating than ever.

Students have great access to information. My role changed to more of a motivator, cheerleader, and encourager than simply that of an instructor imparting knowledge.

Children also seemed to have greater anxiety, due to busy out-of-school schedules, access to scary local and world news events, and overemphasis on assessment performance. Although time seemed limited for personal sharing, classroom family meeting, classroom creative arts, extra recess/movement, and a reassuring touch to distressed students, all of these became much more crucial as the academic stresses become more apparent and overbearing in the last 5 to 10 years.

Children seemed to be more knowledgeable and accepting of differing religions, races, holidays, family traditions, etc. than when I first started teaching, as their classmates came from a much wider selection of cultures and family dynamics.

## **WHAT WILL YOU MISS THE MOST ABOUT TEACHING?**

I will definitely miss the daily interaction with students and staff! I loved getting to know each student I worked with as well as their parents. I was blessed to be a part of two elementary school staffs that valued camaraderie, teamwork, and professional friendship as a way to get through the tougher parts of teaching. I will miss knowing the daily details of events at school, the celebrations and struggles of my colleagues, and the feeling of "we're in this together."



**“No one is a great teacher by working alone or feeling as if they already know it all. Learn from, and support, those who work with you.”**

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST, NOW THAT YOU ARE RETIRED? WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?**

I plan to take time to detox from school stresses and the rush of an overly scheduled life. I hope to exercise, ride my bike, walk, read mindless novels, spend more time with friends, and do some type of community volunteer work. I also hope to use my reading specialist skills to help young students in my community who may struggle with early reading concepts.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ALUMNI WHO ARE EDUCATORS OR ARE THINKING ABOUT CAREERS IN EDUCATION?**

Reach out to all colleagues, including office staff, lunch prep staff, custodial staff, paras, and parent volunteers - each person holds a key to making your job easier and your life more full. Veteran teachers have a wealth of information to share - listen to them... but share your new knowledge and excited enthusiasm with those who have been in the “trenches” for awhile and need your fresh perspective. No one is a great teacher by working alone or feeling as if they already know it all. Learn from, and support, those who work with you.

**IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO YOUR FORMER STUDENTS?**

I would love to fill a huge room with all of you, give you hugs, and stand in amazement at the people you have become! Thank YOU for the wonderful memories, fun moments, proud accomplishments, and for making me the teacher and person I have become.

# DENNIS KWASNY

## NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING IN BHS:

41 years

## SCHOOLS/ GRADES/ SUBJECTS TAUGHT:

I taught one year at BHMS and the rest of my career at Andover and the new high school.

I typically taught juniors and seniors, but occasionally 9th

and 10th grade. I have taught many different classes over the years, but primarily AP Biology and AP Chemistry.



## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM TEACHING?

I have had a lot of funny memories over the years! Let me just say that I like to get to know my students as individuals, and in the process have learned a lot of interesting information.

## ARE STUDENTS AND TEACHING DIFFERENT NOW FROM WHEN YOU STARTED YOUR TEACHING CAREER?

Certainly the world is a lot different now than it was when I started in education. Technology and social media being the two biggest differences. Those have led to a lot of changes in instruction. But being “old school,” I found

that my passion for the subjects I taught and my style of lecture served me well, right up to the end. My students did change, I think over the years. Mainly due to increased pressure over college admission and test (ACT/SAT) scores and, of course, all the extra-curricular activities that are available. Those concerns, and social media temptations, spread them thin in terms of study time. So I think it was easier for students to make time to study back in the day than it is now.

## WHAT WILL YOU MISS THE MOST ABOUT TEACHING?

I will miss the interaction I had with my students.

## WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST, NOW THAT YOU ARE RETIRED?

### WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

I own a sailboat that I have sailed extensively throughout the Great Lakes. I will continue to do that, as well as a lot more traveling outside the country.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ALUMNI WHO ARE EDUCATORS OR ARE THINKING ABOUT CAREERS IN EDUCATION?

I think anyone who is going to make a career in education has to realize it is like no other job. The rewards are extraordinary, but not necessarily in a tangible way. Also I think it is important to be an expert in your subject. It is most important to be able to explain that information in way that allows you to reach all of your students. You need to be able to relate to students, and it is a talent that I think you either have or you don't.

## IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO YOUR FORMER STUDENTS?

I think of my former students often and I wish them all the best in the future.



# ALUMNI GIVING

## ALUMNI CAN GIVE IN SEVERAL WAYS:

- Make an immediate cash donation or donation of non-registered securities.
- Donate to the Bloomfield Hills Schools Foundation Endowment managed by the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan.
- Arrange for future gifts through estate planning.

Please consider a meaningful gift that will continue the tradition of educational excellence at Bloomfield Hills Schools.

For assistance with your giving, contact BHSF Executive Director, Cathie Badalamenti at 248-351-5465.

The BHS Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.  
Tax ID: 26-4589093

The full amount of your gift is deductible as a charitable contribution to the extent permitted by law.

Thank you to the anonymous donor who gave \$58,000 for the BHS orchestra program. We appreciate your incredible generosity! The students of Bloomfield Hills Schools will benefit from your gift for years to come.

## ALUMNI GIFTS TO THE BHS FOUNDATION LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY.

## CELEBRATING THE BHS COMMUNITY, BENEFITTING OUR STUDENTS, STAFF AND SCHOOLS

Annually, the BHS Foundation hosts a signature fundraiser benefitting Bloomfield Hills Schools. This year we are thrilled our Bloomfield Hills High School will serve as the backdrop for this special event.

Our 2020 signature gala Celebrates the powerful link between our community and our schools. Guests are invited to join us for A Taste of Bloomfield Hills. Local restaurants will serve food samples from their menus; student performers will provide us with sample performances from recent and upcoming productions; and grant winners will demonstrate sample grants in action. We're very excited about this opportunity to showcase our students, our schools, and our community. Mark your calendars now. You don't want to miss this event.

Proceeds from this event help the BHS Foundation fund vital school programs to benefit all of our students. Just as important: The Celebration is a night to share our pride in schools, which are at the center of our Bloomfield Hills community.

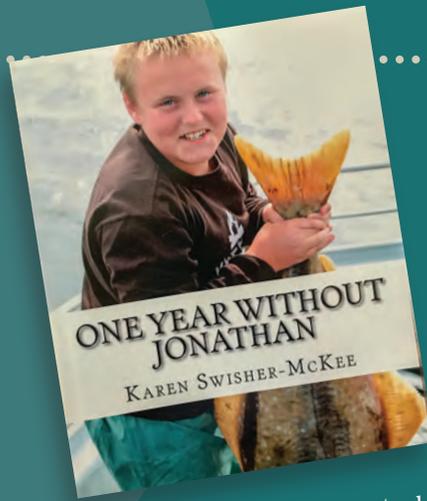
**JOIN US:**  
Tickets for the event are on sale now. If you are interested in sponsoring, donating to, or volunteering for the event, please contact BHSF Executive Director, Cathie Badalamenti at 248-351-5465. We'd love to have you!

# Karen Swisher-McKee

“My whole, entire life, I have been 50 percent creative and 50 percent scientific,” says Karen Swisher-McKee, who graduated from Bloomfield Hills Schools (Lahser) in 1984. “The scientific side decided it was going to be the boss, and we were going to be a podiatrist because we needed to make money. But the creative side in me was always like this squeaky voice inside saying, ‘But what about me?’”

Today, the creative side is dominant. Swisher-McKee is a published author with a growing professional photography business. But the road to that new career has been unimaginable and filled with grief. Swisher-McKee and her husband, Jon, lost their 12-year-old son, Jonathan, to an apparent suicide in 2014, with no note and no answers to this day. They also have a daughter, Jessica, who is in college currently, but who was in middle school with Jonathan at the time.

Swisher-McKee’s book, *One Year Without Jonathan*, is a compilation of the writing and photography therapy that took place in the first year after Jonathan died. “I used my journal entries which were initially just for me to get out my feelings, but then I made it into a book,” explains Swisher-McKee. “It was cathartic for me to do that...not only the journaling, but also the writing and putting it all together. For my readers, the goal was first to help people who were going through something similar. When you lose somebody close to you, you really go into some dark places. I was brutally honest with my thoughts and my feelings. It’s a very isolating experience because not many people are going through this,



so it’s good to know that other people experience the same things.”

Swisher-McKee hopes that people who know someone who is going through grief will read the book as it provides insight and information on how to help. “I think that there’s definitely not enough support because people just really don’t know what to do,” says Swisher-McKee. “I was either crying or trying not to cry for the whole year. The first year is very brutal, and people want a happy ending. For me, and for people who have grieved, just to get through the first year is amazing.”

Swisher-McKee understands that life continues, but says that understanding the perspective of someone who is grieving is important. “I wanted people to know that the grieving process is very long. I think people know that, but people don’t really think about it. They see that you are working, you are going to things, and they think that ‘she’s fine, she’s better.’” Swisher-McKee notes that the historical process of wearing mourning clothes would have made it easier, especially in public places. “In our world where everything is 24/7 and you have to do all this stuff, people aren’t very understanding. There were moments where I just wished that I could say to people, ‘I’m just really grieving right now so give me a break.’ I feel like as a society we could be a little bit more empathetic.”

Swisher-McKee fortunately was surrounded by close family and friends, particularly her sisters. Her sister Paula (Swisher) Maas (BHS Lahser 1982) encouraged Karen to publish *One Year Without Jonathan*.

“Paula has been with me closely on this journey. I had these signs and visions that happened to me that were truly extraordinary. I had an out-of-body experience, where I feel like I saw Jonathan’s heaven, I saw him, I saw angels; and I don’t really know 100 percent how that happened to me,





but I believe in the possibility that I saw something, and it was very reassuring to me. It's probably the thing that helped me the most, and it probably would be reassuring to other people who were dealing with the loss of a close loved one. I think that it's helpful just having hope in life. Paula had her own spiritual situations, so we used to talk for two hours a day. She would read this book, and I would read that book, and we would commiserate. Others have been really supportive of this book, but it does also bring up an element of sadness that he's not here."

Shifting from medicine to the creative arts wasn't as big of a leap as Swisher-McKee had anticipated, but proofreading didn't come as naturally. "I did pretty well in English at Lahser High School because I had a lot of creative ideas. My favorite teacher was Mr. Dull. He always loved my ideas, but he would write on my papers, 'Great ideas, work on the punctuation.' I'm not a person who really cares about rules very much, and that's the thing about grammar and punctuation. It was a concern to me when I was writing that people were going to think I am a terrible writer because of that. And there probably are some people who do, but I hope the majority of people are getting the message instead of how I wrote it."

The photography which comprises the illustrations of the book also was key to the healing process. It took nearly two years to go through the process of writing and publishing. Swisher-McKee says there were months at a time where she couldn't look at photos or process any memories from that first year. Eventually, though, photographs would trigger happy memories. It was those photographs that had her thinking about switching careers to photography.

Swisher-McKee explains, "For a long time, I did not think I was creative any more; I did not think it was in me at all. It really took this drastic event in my life to spark the interest. I might have done a little hobby here and there, and, like maybe, maybe have taken a pottery class or gone to more art institutes or bought art, but I never would have tried to make photography my career. I think I found my happiness elsewhere, and not in my career. Now I feel like I want all of my life to be happy, and I want to always do something that really makes me happy."

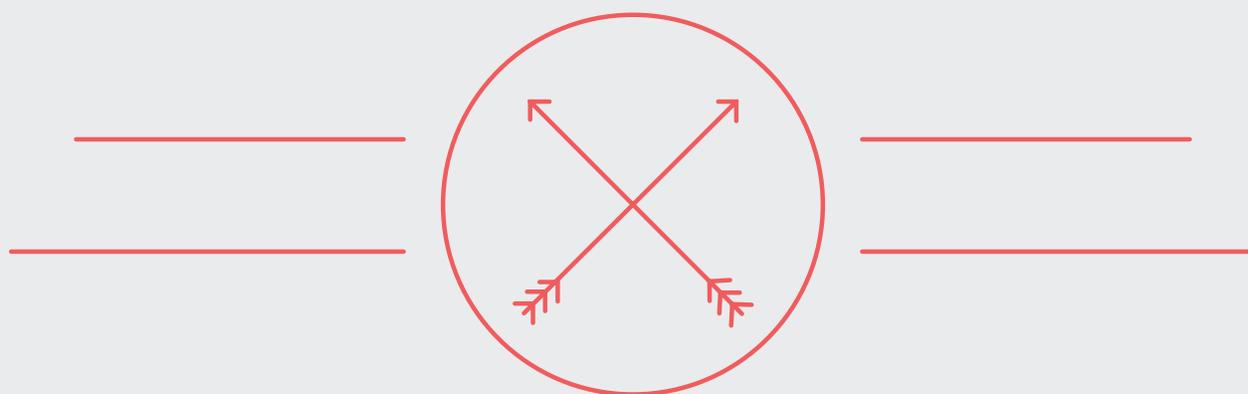
The new business, Karen Swisher-McKee Photography, has been the outgrowth of allowing creativity to flourish. "When Jonathan died, it was like lightning struck me, and I was cracked open," Swisher-McKee discloses. "Everything was exposed and the creative side of me just started growing because I was free of constraints. So then I was like, 'ok, scientific side, you are making me a lot of money, but I'm much happier when I am over here because I'm so sad.' That just grew and grew and grew to the point where I felt like I could make a living doing this because I had to be happy. So now I do a lot of senior pictures, sports photos, and prom pictures, but I also like to take more artsy or unique pictures that can be framed."

"It's definitely a challenge," Swisher-McKee notes, "because I've never done anything like this before, but I'm so happy when I'm doing this that it's important to me to keep doing it. Especially when you come from a place of complete darkness, you yearn for that more than you yearn for anything else...to be happy again."

# Compass Fund Supports Social-Emotional Health

Foundation Honors Classmates from the Class of 1997





The Compass Fund, a grant program established by the Andover and Lahser graduates of the Class of 1997, supports initiatives around the district related to social-emotional health. In remembrance of six of their deceased classmates, with an action plan to assist those who have lost their way, \$3,000 was raised to award funding towards causes such as suicide awareness, anti-bullying, inclusion, substance abuse, and mental health understanding.

Months before their 20th reunion, the Andover class experienced a double tragedy. One of their former classmates took her own life after her 11-year-old son committed suicide.

“Their tragic story touched all of my fellow classmates, including our counterparts at our rival school. Both the Lahser and Andover Class of 1997 reunion committees decided to join forces to honor her, and six other AHS/LHS 1997 classmates that had tragically committed suicide or overdosed,” said Vice President of the Bloomfield Hills School Foundation and Andover graduate, Christine Tang.

Alumni were able to come together two decades after their graduation year to organize a memorial display to honor and recognize their classmates who had passed away. The hope for this fund is to prevent further loss, and to provide resources and tools for community members.

Kat Crawford, co-creator of the program, said, “We decided to call it the Compass Fund because we wanted the name to signify a foundation that supports students who had lost their way. The idea behind the symbol is that it would help focus on many different places where kids could have a difficult time getting back onto the path of success, and help them find their way.”

Potential Compass Fund projects are placed under review by 12 Board Members through the Bloomfield Hills Schools Foundation grant application process. Proposals are then evaluated and categorized, with an emphasis on innovation and impactfulness.

The first recipient of the fund was high school social worker, Wendy Olah. Using the grant, Olah had pamphlets available in the counseling office that promote health and wellness through the discussion of sensitive topics.

The next grant was awarded to West Hills Middle School for the English Language Learners Puzzle Partnership. This partnership program helps build and strengthen connections between students by having them work together on a puzzle.

East Hills Middle School also received a grant dedicated to the practice of mindfulness. Teachers were given the chance to take a course to address the regulation of emotions and engagement with factors such as stress and anxiety.

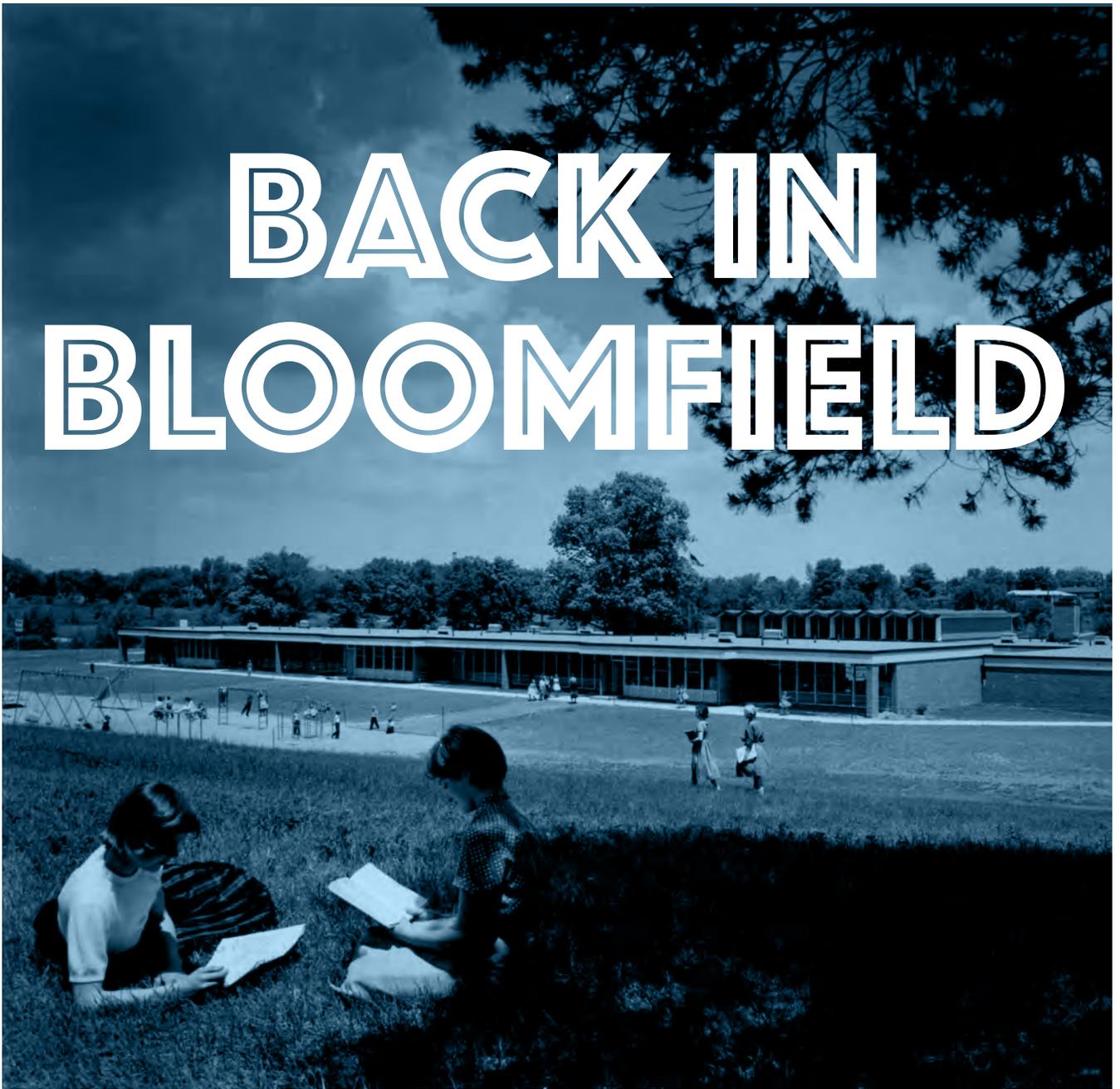
“Having these kinds of opportunities available for students to get help, and creating more awareness of issues that people might be experiencing is exactly what this class wanted,” said Cathie Badalamenti, executive director of the Bloomfield Hills Schools Foundation.

The members involved in organizing the Compass Fund and its donations encourage more people to submit requests for funding.

Crawford said, “Nobody is going to turn away a kid that says, ‘We want more programming to support our health and wellness.’”

---

# BACK IN BLOOMFIELD



*Alumni on Staff*

.....

# VALERIE (SWANSON) BRENNECKE

Lahser Class of 1987

## CURRENT POSITION AND SCHOOLS WHERE YOU HAVE WORKED:

I currently teach 4th grade at Way (for the last 16 years). Originally, I was hired at Lahser to teach Spanish and English, and then moved to Conant to help grow the elementary Spanish program. I also taught Spanish and language arts at BHMS. After taking a few maternity leaves, I returned to Way to teach 5th grade for 6 years and now teach 4th grade.

## WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT TEACHING?

The best part of working in Bloomfield is the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues who are inventive and student-centered. Over the years, I have enjoyed creating the Elementary Spanish curriculum with a team of teachers, and currently I love working with teachers from other district schools to refine instruction at the elementary level. My colleagues at Way inspire me daily with their diligence and the sharing of their teaching craft!

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BHS TODAY AND WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT?

The biggest difference over time has been in the evolution of technology and its impact on the classroom. I remember in 1998 when we first had landline telephones installed in our classrooms! In the early 2000s at Way, we had hanging televisions in place of Promethean Boards. And the Internet! Oh my! It has helped with comprehensive communication and really impacted instruction, thinking and writing across the content areas— for the better of course!

## NAME A TEACHER WHO INSPIRED YOU.

When I think back, my 5th grade teacher Sharon Schlaff (I knew her as Miss Sommers) used to read us wonderful poetry and play her guitar on Friday afternoons. She truly taught me the love of literature and music. As a secondary student at the high school, I was inspired by the teachers who encouraged me to try things that made me step out



of my comfort zone. I was quite shy back then, and both Paul DeRubeis (band teacher) and Bill Chrisman (yearbook and newspaper teacher) encouraged me to find my voice. Each of those teachers taught me the value of owning my independence as a learner and to take risks as a creative thinker. I have warm, fond memories of these three inspiring educators!



# SAMER ALSAYED SULIMAN

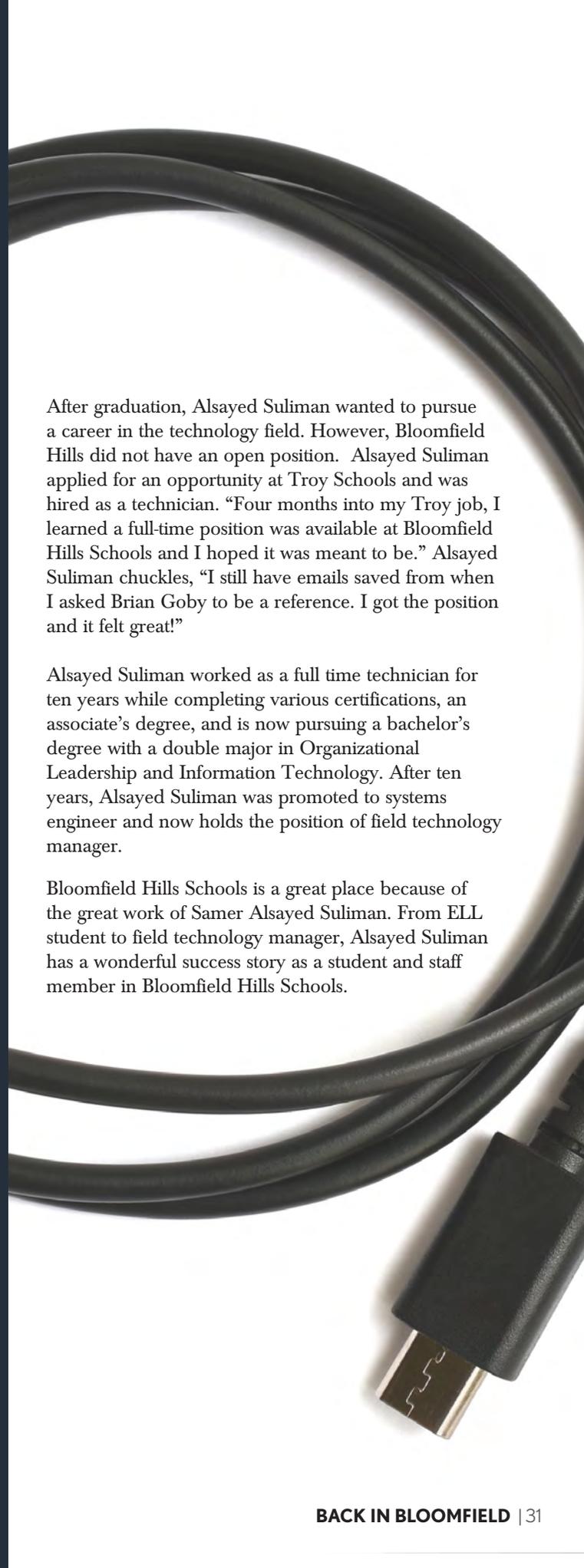
Lahser Class of 2007

If you work in Bloomfield Hills Schools, you know Samer Alsayed Suliman in Information Services. His quick smile and wit can calm the most frayed of nerves when tech problems arise. Alsayed Suliman was born in the United States, then moved to Syria from ages 3- to 6-years-old and then Saudi Arabia for three years. "I skipped two grades in the middle east. When I moved to Bloomfield Hills as a 9-year-old, they placed me in 6th grade at East Hills. I was so scared and cried for three days. I didn't speak any English and everyone was so much larger than me. After those first few days, I transferred to Lone Pine and attended 5th grade in an English Language Learner class." Alsayed Suliman lived near Hickory Grove Elementary and rode the bus to and from Lone Pine. "You'll never guess who my bus driver was ... it was Carol Weaver!" Carol Weaver is the current secretary at East Hills. "Mrs. Weaver has always been so caring and kind."

Alsayed Suliman reflects on another memory when growing up as a student in Bloomfield Hills and working in the district created an interesting connection, "I was helping a new teacher to set up classroom technology. We spent about 20 minutes together and at the conclusion she graciously thanked me and asked me my name. When I told her 'Samer,' she paused and said, you were in my ESL class! It was Mrs. Valbuena!" Valbuena paused teaching for a number of years to raise her family, and returned as the current BHMS Spanish teacher. "I couldn't believe I didn't recognize her, she looks exactly the same after 15 years."

After spending one year at Lone Pine, Alsayed Suliman transferred to East Hills for his 6th to 8th grade years. "There are a few teachers who are still teaching at East Hills from when I attended there. However, Mr. Dorchock, my excellent math teacher just retired a few years ago."

Alsayed Suliman looks back on his student academic life and admits there wasn't a subject that inspired exceptional passion, until high school. During junior year at Lahser High School, there was a turning point in his life. "I had no clue that I had any interest in technology. I started taking notice of these tech people fixing computers in the media center and in different places around the high school." Alsayed Suliman spent quite a bit of time after school observing, taking an interest, and talking with the computer techs. "It then occurred to me to ask if I could earn my 40 hours of community service by helping the IT department. I'll never forget the day, it was Monday, June 26, 2006, my first day. I completed my full 40 hours in that one week. After that week, they offered me a summer job as a paid student helper." Alsayed Suliman continued to work during his senior year, admitting, "At times it was a bit awkward as I entered the teachers' lounge as an employee. Teachers would clamor, you shouldn't be here!" Samer laughs remembering the confused looks on teachers' faces.



After graduation, Alsayed Suliman wanted to pursue a career in the technology field. However, Bloomfield Hills did not have an open position. Alsayed Suliman applied for an opportunity at Troy Schools and was hired as a technician. “Four months into my Troy job, I learned a full-time position was available at Bloomfield Hills Schools and I hoped it was meant to be.” Alsayed Suliman chuckles, “I still have emails saved from when I asked Brian Goby to be a reference. I got the position and it felt great!”

Alsayed Suliman worked as a full time technician for ten years while completing various certifications, an associate’s degree, and is now pursuing a bachelor’s degree with a double major in Organizational Leadership and Information Technology. After ten years, Alsayed Suliman was promoted to systems engineer and now holds the position of field technology manager.

Bloomfield Hills Schools is a great place because of the great work of Samer Alsayed Suliman. From ELL student to field technology manager, Alsayed Suliman has a wonderful success story as a student and staff member in Bloomfield Hills Schools.

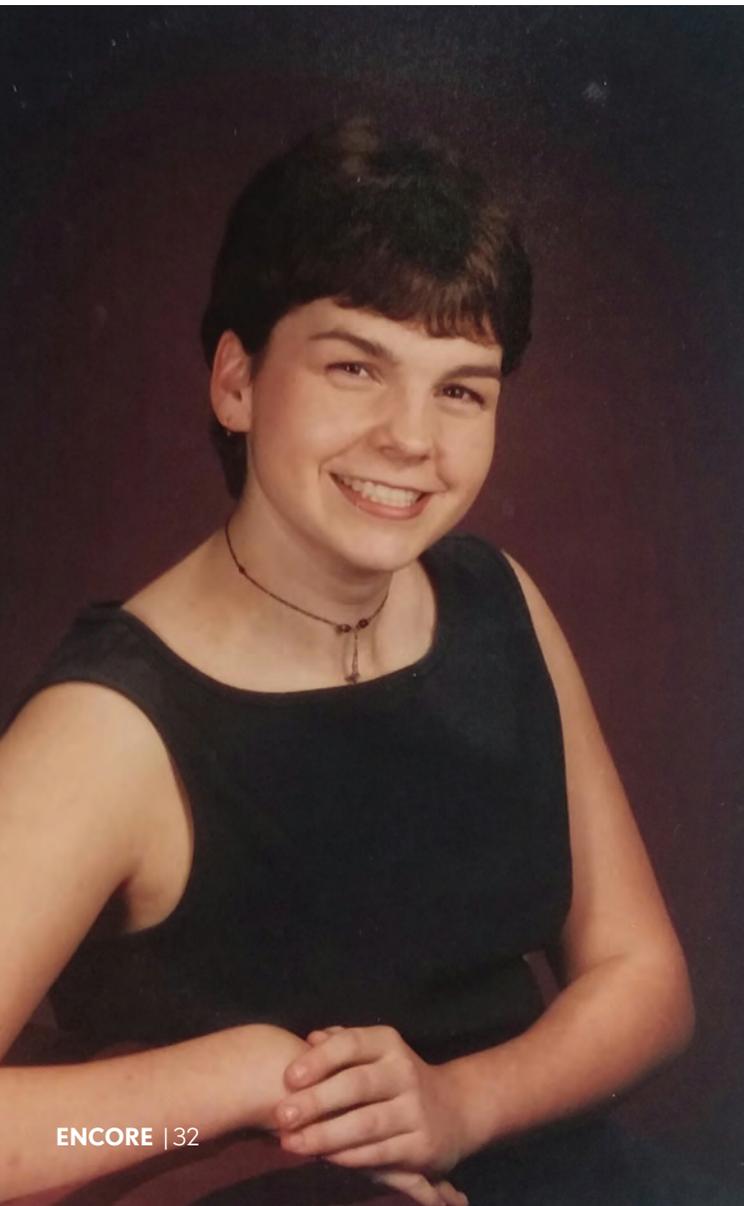
.....

# LAURA (CHITCHUK) KESNER

Andover Class of 1997

### CURRENT POSITION AND SCHOOLS WHERE YOU HAVE WORKED:

I have worked at Bloomfield Hills Middle School for the last eight years as a General Education Resource Teacher (now Learning Specialist)



### WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT TEACHING IN BHS?

The best part about teaching at BHS is the school community we create at BHMS. All of the teachers, staff, and administrators are like a big family and support each other and the students tremendously. Also, the students are amazing and bring a wide variety of talents and achievements to all of our schools!

### WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BHS TODAY AND WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT?

There aren't any more mushy cookies in the school cafeteria! I think the biggest difference is that the middle schools have 4th and/or 5th grade in their buildings now. I went to Pine Lake, which is no longer around, until the 5th grade then moved on to the middle school building.

### NAME A TEACHER WHO INSPIRED YOU.

I had many awesome teachers in elementary, middle, and high school, but the teacher who stands out the most for me is Mrs. Clees, my high school drama teacher. She made each student feel like they were the most important person, and she really listened and cared for each of us. She is the epitome of the Maya Angelou quote, "At the end of the day, people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel."

I try to model her behavior when I am building relationships with my students. I want them to feel as special and cared for as Mrs. Clees made me feel!



# LIZA (SUGAR) LAUTER

Andover Class of 2001

## **CURRENT POSITION AND SCHOOLS WHERE YOU HAVE WORKED:**

K-12 English Teacher Leader and English Teacher at Bloomfield Hills High School

## **WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO COME BACK AND TEACH IN BHS?**

Bloomfield Hills Schools embrace creativity, innovation, a global mindset, and passion for learning.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BHS TODAY AND WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT?**

The high school looks a lot different, and I'm very jealous of the beautiful theater! Yet, my first year back, I was walking through the G-Wing and heard Mr. Kwasny talking, which gave me major flashbacks to AP Bio.

## **NAME A TEACHER WHO INSPIRED YOU.**

There were so many! A few in particular were Mr. Snyder (Choir), Ms. Clees (Forensics), Mrs. Martin (AP Lit), Señora Gelman (Spanish), and Mrs. Bogrette (Theater) - who I now get to call a colleague and a friend.

## **WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS OR SKILLS YOU LEARNED FROM BEING AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?**

Public speaking skills! Through forensics, choir, and theatre I learned to be comfortable and well-spoken in front of others.

## **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?**

Find ways to remain a lifelong reader because it's the best way to enter other worlds and continue learning throughout your life.





# ALAN POSNER

Alan Posner is a 2004 graduate of Bloomfield Hills School and currently serves as the Bloomfield Hills High School Band Director. A proud product of our schools, Posner infuses a passion for music and education. Students who have the privilege of working with Posner are inspired by his dedication, musical talent, and sense of humor.

## TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

It was a dream come true of mine to follow in the footsteps of my former teacher, mentor, and friend, Mr. Bob Ambrose after he retired from the district five years ago. I love to make music, watch and play sports (particularly hockey and football), and spend time with my family. I live in Berkley with my wife, Michelle, and our two sons, Asher and Owen.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE GENRE OF MUSIC?

I think this really depends on the day or what mood I'm in. I know it sounds cliché, but I listen to all different genres of music.

## WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU LOVED MUSIC?

When I was a sophomore in high school I knew that I wanted to be a band director. I consider myself very lucky that I've pretty much always known what I've wanted to do with my life. Perhaps my "a-ha" music moment was when I was a camper at the Interlochen All-State program when I was 15. The first piece the conductor had the ensemble play was La Fiesta Mexica (the second movement called "Mass"). I vividly remember how the first three chords profoundly changed how I thought about and listened to music.

## WHAT INSTRUMENTS DO YOU PLAY?

I play all of the band instruments (to varying levels of success). My primary instrument is saxophone. I chose it because I wanted to learn how to play the Pink Panther in 4th grade at Lone Pine Elementary (which I now know how to play)!

## WHAT'S THE LAST SONG YOU LISTENED TO IN THE CAR?

Honestly, it was probably something from a children's music album. We do a family music class together and our son loves to listen to his music when we drive. Other than that it was probably something by the band "Punch Brothers." We recently went to their concert. They are an absolutely amazing group.

## HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BAND PIECES FOR MARCHING BAND OR CONCERT BAND?

Very carefully! In band, the music I choose is the curriculum, so I put a lot of time and effort into it. We have a pretty extensive library at BHHS (over 1,000 pieces). I'm also on the look out for new music, and am constantly listening for something that would fit one of our ensembles.

## WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL STUDENT?

Some of my most fond memories come from the music department at Andover High School and the lasting friendships that I developed there. I still keep in close contact with many of my friends from high school. I specifically remember performing on stage in the musicals and plays, performing in the choir, traveling with the band to Chicago and Scotland, as well as going to band camp every year.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS THAT YOU LEARNED?

I think the most important thing I learned in my time at Bloomfield Hills was how to be myself and how to be a good leader. I was so fortunate to have a group of friends in high school that were supportive and shared common interests. Band in particular really encouraged and challenged me to be the leader and educator that I am today. It's safe to say that I would not be where I am today without the performing arts program at Andover High School.

## DO YOU STILL DRAW UPON YOUR BHS EXPERIENCE TODAY?

I love that I get to try and return the love and encouragement that Bloomfield Hills gave to me in my formative years. I find it a little easier for me to put myself in my students' shoes, having gone through similar experiences when I was in high school.



.....

**“I THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED IN MY TIME AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS WAS HOW TO BE MYSELF AND HOW TO BE A GOOD LEADER.”**

.....

**IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE?**

I very much admire the performing arts staff at Andover High School. Bob Ambrose, Dave Reed, Bruce Snyder, and Roberta Campion were all instrumental in my development as a student. They have done so much for so many students who passed through their doors at Bloomfield Hills.

**IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY EXCITED ABOUT FOR YOUR OWN FUTURE?**

I am looking forward to continuing my time at Bloomfield Hills and growing the program. This year we have almost 200 students in the band program!

# LARA BUSHON

Lahser Class of 1999

## CURRENT POSITION AND SCHOOLS WHERE YOU HAVE WORKED:

Art Teacher at West Hills Middle School



## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM YOUR TIME AS A BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOL STUDENT?

So many to recall! In 5th grade, at Conant, we took a trip to Canada to camp and fossil hunt! It was my first experience with riding in the last row, rear-facing station wagon (throwback!) and we actually found a trilobite fossil! My teacher reminded me of a real-life Miss Frizzle from the *Magic School Bus*. I also had a fabulous team of teachers in middle school at BHMS who started a program called IMAST - Integrated Math and Science Technology. We had so many amazing experiences, such as designing and building a hydroponics unit to grow plants. We were challenged to design, build, and test a prosthetic hand. We also went to the General Motors Proving Ground where we observed the safety testing systems of crashes and actually witnessed them crash at Corvette.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU LEARNED FROM BEING AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS?

I think it was after leaving Bloomfield Hills Schools where I truly realized how fortunate I was to have the opportunities, especially in the art department. I was exposed to so many different mediums.

## IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE?

I had some fantastic teachers who were really patient with me. I was pretty active and chatty as a student, and most were very patient and channeled my energy. I am still working on the chatty part! Outside of BHS, I admire anyone who manages to put on a smiling face and go the extra mile for people, even though they may be suffering inside. I also admire the minds and artwork of Guan Xiao, DL Warfield, Alexa Meade, and Basquiat.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT STUDENTS OR ALUMNI?

Current students: you are so fortunate to have the opportunities you have here in Bloomfield Hills. Join as many clubs and sports as you can! Also, give back! Use the skills you learn to help others.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Still, making a name as an artist has been a long road in the Detroit area, especially starting out. Says Solomon, “When I started as a ‘street artist,’ there was – and is – a whole stigma about carrying a spray can. For some reason people don’t think we are real artists because we choose to use a spray can. They expect us to work for free because we use a spray can. It’s really obnoxious. When I started, it was a completely different industry, as there was no street art or graffiti industry in the city at all. There were maybe two or three different people getting paid to do that kind of work. It was like pulling teeth to convince people that this art was viable and valuable. Unfortunately, the Detroit metro area is a little bit behind the rest of the world when it comes to the debate. It’s still an ongoing debate here on street art versus real art. That debate was settled in 1985 with Jean Michel Basquiat. It’s 30 years old, but we are still talking about it in Detroit.”

Solomon cautions up-and-coming artists of any kind to focus equally on their body of work and their social media exposure. “I see a lot of people doing either/or. If you focus on the artwork and focus on your craft, most things will follow. Because of the digital age a lot of people get caught up in a social media persona more than the mastery of their craft.”

Another recommendation is to make patience part of your toolkit, as much as a pencil or a can of spray paint. “The higher the stakes of the job, the worse the waiting is,” Solomon reveals. “For younger artists coming up, patience might be the greatest single virtue. If somebody is going to take a creative path down the road, learn patience in all things. It requires zen-like patience...with yourself, with your clients, with your work, with the industry. Really, it might be the single most important thing because there are so many things connected with that kind of patience, like being able to keep going when you fail, being able to take a project back from a client 20 times until you get it right, listening to clients nitpick details, being able to hear their words of gravity...it all requires patience.”

As Solomon practices this patience, he also continues to design, experiment, and grow as an artist. “There’s so much more competition that is in-your-face competition as opposed to abstract competition. It’s definitely expanded the audience. When I was growing up, if I did a mural, it might take years for an image of it to end up in Tokyo. Now, because of social media and digital media, I can do a piece and

before I even finish, someone in Australia could see it. The audience with social media is insane. Anybody, anywhere in the world can see what you just did in real time. It’s mind blowing, and it’s absolutely changed the game.”



### RECONNECT WITH BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS

Wherever you go, Bloomfield Hills Schools will always be home. Your connection to the BHS community continues after graduation and extends beyond our city limits.

As a student, your link to BHS was active and strong. As an alumni, your continued involvement gives our entire BHS community strength. We encourage you to stay connected and continue to be part of the "Tradition of Excellence" at BHS!

### STAY CONNECTED:

- Update your contact information at [bloomfield.org/alumni](http://bloomfield.org/alumni).
- Volunteer with the BHS Foundation, at Bowers Farm, or at E.L. Johnson Nature Center. Call the BHSF at 248-341-5465.
- Make a donation in support of Bloomfield Hills Schools at [www.bloomfield.org/give](http://www.bloomfield.org/give)
- Schedule a class reunion tour of the new high school by calling the BHS Foundation at 248-341-5465.

### CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

 [www.bloomfield.org](http://www.bloomfield.org)  
[www.bloomfield.org/Foundation](http://www.bloomfield.org/Foundation)

 @bhschools  
@bhsfoundation

 @bhschools  
@BHSFoundationMI

 [www.facebook.com/bhschools](http://www.facebook.com/bhschools), [www.facebook.com/BHSFoundationMI](http://www.facebook.com/BHSFoundationMI)

### SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS THROUGH THE BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

For many, the idea of a public K-12 school foundation is unfamiliar. As public school funding is increasingly constrained, foundations fill a critical gap by supporting teaching and learning opportunities and experiences for our students. In 2008, Michigan ranked 8th in per-pupil funding nationwide. Today, we rank 24th. A recent MSU study revealed that Michigan was dead last nationwide in K-12 revenue growth. Our schools are receiving less funding per student while we are asked to do more and more.

The BHS Foundation provides a vehicle for individuals, businesses, and organizations to share resources and gifts with the schools. We raise private dollars to support essential programs in core and co-curricular academics; visual, performing and applied arts; and health, physical education, and athletics. Our grants provide funds for maker spaces and innovation labs, diverse literacy initiatives, robotics and forensics programs, social and emotional health resources, student and staff development, and more.

Please consider a gift to the BHS Foundation. Donations can be made at [www.bloomfield.org/give](http://www.bloomfield.org/give). Learn more about us, support our mission, and reconnect with the BHS community. Visit us at [www.bloomfield.org/Foundation](http://www.bloomfield.org/Foundation).

.....  
**Curious about the biggest suggested change since Andover & Lahser combined?**

Check out  
**WWW.BLOOMFIELD.ORG/BOND**  
for details!

### BHS Foundation Community Calendar

(An Up-to-Date Calendar is available at [www.bloomfield.org/Foundation](http://www.bloomfield.org/Foundation))

- 3.28.2020 : BHS Foundation CeleBHration is a signature gala celebrating Bloomfield Hills Schools. Join us as a guest or sponsor. Call for details: 248-341-5465.
- 5.1.2020 : Tribute Campaign. Donate in recognition/
- to : honor/memory of teachers, mentors,
- 6.30.2020 : students, and loved ones.