JOAN ABRAHAM was part of her mother’s business, Mary’s Chocolate Shop, for 12 years as the owner for eight. After selling the company in 2009, she began working at Porter Hills as the Vice President of Sales & Marketing. During her tenure, Abraham established a resident choir. Although that had nothing to do with her position, she describes it as one of the greatest achievements of her life. “This was an ordinary senior choir singing hymns and oldies. They were dynamic and extraordinary,” she says. Abraham continues to use her musical background directing the choir at St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox for the last year. She is currently President of Development and Executive Director of the Foundation for Clark Retirement Communities and enjoys the significant influence she still has on the lives of seniors. Abraham remains active in the community as a member of the Rotary Club of Grand Rapids, Economic Club of Grand Rapids, Michigan Women’s Foundation, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, and the Chi Omega Alumnae Chapter of West Michigan.

SINCE TURNING 60, Marian Barrera-Young has continued her work at the Baxter Neighborhood Association as a Crime Prevention Coordinator and Executive Director. She focuses on public safety and improving the quality of life within the Baxter and Martin Luther King neighborhoods. One example of her work is a youth camp to clean alleys, put house numbers on homes, plant gardens, paint the inside of homes, and much more. Barrera-Young recently partnered with various Grand Rapids organizations to build the first balloon pump in the city, which is now a favorite gathering place for community members. Barrera-Young provides essential services for senior citizens who are not close to family or live alone and shares her vast experience by training Criminal Justice students at Grand Rapids Community College. “I am driven by compassion, passion, and love for the people within the community’s service,” she says. Barrera-Young also serves as President of Neighborhood Associations of Michigan, Secretary for the Franklin and Eastern Business Association, and was appointed to the Michigan Citizens Corps Council.

JoAnn Abraham, Volunteer, Mentor

Marian Barrera-Young, Neighborhood Leader, Crime Preventer, Volunteer

Since turning 60, Kate Dernocoeur has put her 40 years of experience working with seniors to work for non-profit organizations. Kate has worked with the Kenwood Boys and Girls Club, the Boys and Girls Club of Grand Rapids, and was appointed to the Michigan Citizens Corps Council. Kate is also an Alumnae Chapter of West Michigan.

Barbara H. Hohman

ROBERT HILL has been performing concerts for nursing homes in Kent County since 1990. Hill spends about eight hours a day, often seven days a week, volunteering at Brookcrest Rehab & Life Center where he prepares the dining room for lunch and dinner meals, plays special musical programs, and interacts with the residents. “I call the residents by name and try to help them feel at home and loved,” he says. One of his most valued qualities is his ability to care about his coworkers and staff of Brookcrest. Whether it’s giving birthday cards or serving residents chocolate ice cream when they feel they’re not having the best day, Hill is always ready to go the extra mile to support others. In addition to his involvement at Brookcrest and performing at other nursing homes, Hill works with the Boy Scouts of America. Once a scoutmaster in the city of Wyoming, Hill continues to dedicate his time to the organization, totaling to a 69-year commitment.

AT 60 YEARS OLD, Kate Dernocoeur was by far the eldest to graduate from the Plantiff Fire Academy course in 2014. Previously a paramedic in Denver, she was not new to first-responder work but took on the challenge to become a volunteer firefighter for the Ada Fire Department. Dernocoeur is also currently a volunteer member for the Kent County Search and Rescue Committee. In addition to being involved in many community events throughout the year, something Dernocoeur particularly loves is giving presentations to senior groups. “The audience responses have been overwhelming and have had the opportunity to train some of the emergency medical services community and beyond after turning 60. When Kate isn’t firefighting or writing, she can be found hiking or on adventures throughout the world — in places such as Croatia, France, and Japan.

Sister Jarrett DeWyse, OF Dominican Sister, Social Justice Advocate, Connector

Dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals in need, Sister Jarrett DeWyse helps countless West Michigan residents in need of affordable housing and advocates for the most vulnerable in our community. “The most rewarding part has been, and I can imagine that I’ll continue to think of no better way to spend it than by helping others to fully realize their dignity and embrace a sense of wholeness,” she says. These are not only words Sister Jarrett lives by, but also words she acts on. Her work as a Director of Housing at Dwelling Place has resulted in the creation and construction of over 15 affordable housing projects, which have provided over 230 homes as well as help revitalize the city. Her work has created a voice for those who yearn to be heard. After retirement, Sister Jarrett took on the Planning Coordinator position for the Dominican Sisters’ Marywood Campus. Her efforts will assure that not only her senior sisters but many other aging adults in Grand Rapids will be accommodated in the future, leaving a long-lasting positive impact on the community.

Micki Benz

Jack Greenfield

Robert W. Hill

Kate Dernocoeur

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Jack Greenfield has achieved much to uphold his belief that “by working together, we can build a stronger community.” Dedicating his career to the behavioral health field, Greenfield has been able to connect many West Michigan residents to the help they need by uniting community resources. He is currently the Chair of the Allied Health Care Opportunities Leadership Council and member of the Kent County Family and Children’s Coordinating Council. He also served as the corporate representative on the Health Michigan United Way Board of Directors for six years. These organizations strive to reduce poverty, provide access to quality afterschool programs that prepare children for college, work, and life, as well as help individuals and families achieve their greatest potential. Greenfield is currently the President and CEO of Arbor Circle, a private nonprofit organization that provides more than 70 programs and services including mental health counseling, substance use treatment, family development, adoption and foster care, advocacy, prevention, and quality child care services.

Micki Benz Community Champion, Connector, Mentor

JoAnn Abraham Volunteer, Mentor

Sister Jarrett DeWyse, OF Dominican Sister, Social Justice Advocate, Connector

Robert W. Hill Volunteer, Musician, Scoutmaster

Barbara H. Hohman Fundraiser, Leader, Music Advocate

Engaged & Inspiring 2018 Honorees

Engaged & Inspiring 2018 Honorees
Gwendolyn P. Nathan has been described as a tireless advocate and change maker in the Grand Rapids Community. She believes in “staying involved with all the great organizations and awesome leaders that are making all life better.” Nathan worked with the City of Grand Rapids Administrative Services at the Customer Service Information Desk and in the Human Resources Department. While working with people from around the world in Rapids, she connected customers with the right services and people as well as cared for everyone who came into the door. Although she no longer works for the city, Nathan continues to volunteer in the Diversity and Inclusion Office, including her contributions to the Rosa Parks Essay Contest, where she organizes, copies, and prepares nearly 700 middle school and high school essays. The 10th Celebration of Diversity and Inclusion was also made possible due to her work leading up to the event. Nathan now works at Well House, a local nonprofit, as her continuing investment in the community.

PRESICLA KIMBOKO lives her life sharing her gerontology expertise. Larry Robson has continued to stay active in the community he’s called home since 1971. He is the former President of the Great Lakes Coalition and has held positions on several boards, including the Salvation Army and the Grand Rapids Symphony. Robson currently serves on the boards of the GSU Foundation, Health West, Grand Valley State University, and Metro Health. Additionally, he is an active member of the Rotary Club of Grand Rapids. Robson has continued his work with the University of Michigan by serving on the Admissions Committee for its medical school and on the board of its Cardiovascular Center. He also dedicates time teaching vascular surgery at Spectrum Health and mentoring GVUS students through the Cook Leadership Academy.Attributing the motivation for all his work to his “sincere desire to help those less fortunate, love of this town, and desire to make it a better place for all people of all means who live here,” Robson names his parents and family as his inspiration.

DONNA STERLING has one goal — “to honor God and show His love to others.” In her active pursuit of fulfilling this goal, Sterling connects aging people with others in church communities. She can often be found visiting the sick, making blankets, or packing lunches for those in need. Sterling has been described as someone people know they can turn to, trust, and depend on — “the glue” of the situation. For the past 10 years, Sterling has had the opportunity to serve as an advocate for a Vietnamese friend who has limited English skills and is facing challenging times. Since turning the young age of 60, Sterling has taught preschool at her church. “I wish I could bottle up the young students’ enthusiasm for learning,” she says. Sterling also earned a college degree at age 60 and works at her daughter’s accounting firm where she connects aging people with others in senior communities. She can often be found visiting the sick, making blankets, or packing lunches for those in need. With her extensive background in executive education and leadership consulting, Grand Valley State University asked Van Dyck to help develop a proposal for an Executive MBA program for Spectrum Health. Because of the program’s success, a public Executive MBA with a similar design was later developed and launched. Moving to Grand Rapids was a new, wonderful opportunity to continue to “pay it forward” and inspire young leaders in the community. Van Dyck finds his work comparable to an architect or craftsman builder: “The goal will always be to develop a mindset for curiosity and expanded perspectives that respectfully challenges the status quo and confronts our own biases to yield creative change,” he says. When not inspiring change in the community, Van Dyck takes the time to train for and run in 10K and half-marathon races throughout Michigan. He refers to this time as “meditation in motion.” When he finishes his work at GVUS, Van Dyck plans on retiring (again), and continuing to volunteer with his wife, Pam.

KAREN WEAVER has been a student since she was two years old in her mother’s classroom. “My retirement at age 62 did not stop me from being a student,” she says. After a career as a teacher, Weaver took retirement as an opportunity to explore new worlds, meet new people, and embrace new causes. Weaver continues to work in the front of the house for the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre; she opens her home to artists from around the world who have entered their work in ArtPrize, and is also involved with D4ART — an extension of ArtPrize that embraces disabilities. One of Weaver’s biggest passions since childhood has always been personal environmental sustainability. This passion has led her to assist in Calvin College’s Food Recovery Network, guest speak at schools, and organize tours of the Kent County Recycling Center. Weaver is personally inspired to see high school catechism students at Neland Avenue Church.