

Senior NEIGHBORS

no longer alone

Engaged & Inspiring

2018 HONOREES



JoAnn Abraham
*Executive Leader,
Volunteer, Mentor*

JOANN ABRAHAM was part of her mother's business, MaryAnn's Chocolates, for 32 years and served as the owner for eight. After selling the company in 2008, 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 no 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 43rd year. She is currently the Vice 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.



Sister Jarrett DeWyse, OP
*Dominican Sister, Social Justice
Advocate, Connector*

DEDICATING HER LIFE to social justice, Grand Rapids Dominican Sister Jarrett DeWyse helps countless West Michigan residents in need of affordable housing and advocates for the most vulnerable in our community. "I have been given one wild and precious life, and I can think of no better way to spend it than by supporting 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 Director of Housing at Dwelling Place has resulted in the creation and construction of over 15 affordable housing projects, which have provided shelter and new jobs, as well as helped 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.



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

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 leading 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 KaBoom Park 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 I serve," 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.



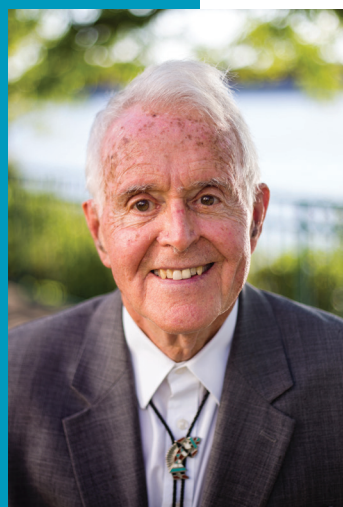
Jack Greenfield
*Executive Leader,
Collaborator, Connector*

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 Expanded Learning Opportunities Network Leadership Council and member of the Kent County Family and Children's Coordinating Council. He also served as the nonprofit representative on the Heart of West 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 50 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*

AFTER MORE THAN 20 YEARS at Mercy Health Saint Mary's, most recently serving as the Vice President of External Relations, Micki Benz decided to work part-time so she could focus more on volunteer and board commitments. As Board President of the Literacy Center of West Michigan, Benz supports the organization's mission of creating a vibrant and just West Michigan through the power of literacy. She also serves on the boards of the Beacon Hill Foundation, East Grand Rapids Library Commission, Health Net of West Michigan, and Legacy Trust. Benz and her husband currently chair the Major Gifts Committee of the Habitat for Humanity's Brighter Future Campaign, which supports the Roosevelt Park neighborhood. "I truly believe that at my age and with my experience, my first job now is to mentor, coach, and pass the torch of leadership to the next generation," she says. In addition to her extensive board work, Benz spends time working on political campaigns for local candidates and mentoring young professionals as they develop and move forward in their careers.



Robert W. Hill
*Volunteer, Musician,
Scoutmaster*

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 Hill's most valued qualities is the way he cares about the residents and staff of Brookcrest. Whether it's giving birthday cards or serving residents chocolate ice cream when he feels 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.



Kate Dernocoeur
*Firefighter,
Adventure Traveler, Writer*

AT 60 YEARS OLD, Kate Dernocoeur was by far the eldest to graduate from the Plainfield 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 K9 unit for Kent County Search and Rescue. In addition to being involved in many community events throughout the year, something Dernocoeur particularly loves is giving presentations to senior groups. "Through these presentations, I have been able to raise citizen awareness about what happens and things to do if they have to call 911," she says. To share her passion for service, Dernocoeur writes. A journalist and nonfiction writer, she has published books for 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.



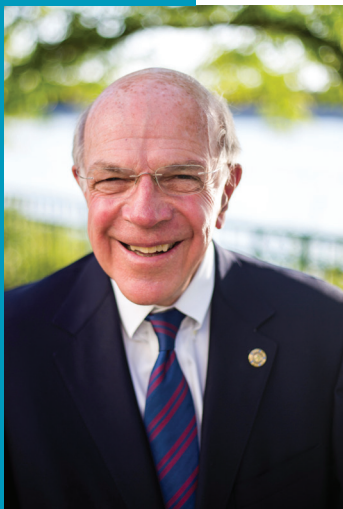
Barbara H. Hohman
*Fundraiser, Leader,
Music Advocate*

SINCE TURNING 60, Barbara Hohman has left a tremendous impact on the Grand Rapids community. During her time as the Director of Resource Development at Senior Neighbors, Hohman raised money to support organizational programs. She is also a leader in the Association of Fundraising Professionals of West Michigan Board of Directors, where she began a mentorship program, expanded scholarship opportunities, as well as focused heavily on integrating diversity and inclusion. She believes that "by serving the fundraising profession [she is] attempting to increase the respect and sustainability of fundraising in West Michigan and worldwide." Hohman has served on financial committees and as a Moderator at Mayflower Church and currently serves as Vice Moderator and Personnel Committee Chair. She also serves on the Grand Rapids Symphony Development Committee and as the Vice Chairman on the Salvation Army Grand Rapids Advisory Board. Hohman remains active by spending time singing in the Chancel Choir at Mayflower Church and working with a group of adolescents, including her 12-year-old granddaughter, as a master gardener.



Priscilla J. Kimboko, Ph.D.
*Professor, Aging Expert,
Wellness Advocate*

PRISCILLA KIMBOKO lives her life sharing her gerontology expertise with the goal of “ensuring that older adults in our society age with dignity, respect, and support, and are valued as active contributors to our community.” While Kimboko has served as a Grand Valley State University administrator, she currently teaches graduate students, organizes caregiving workshops for the elderly, and works with university employees and the community to create a dynamic learning experience. Through her work, Kimboko initiated The Art and Science of Aging, an annual conference that educates more than 300 people on evidence-based, age-appropriate services, knowledge, and healthy aging strategies. Kimboko has remained active by serving as a member of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan Advisory Council, Encore GR Advisory Group, GRCC Gerontology program Advisory Group, and GRCE/AAAWM Creating Community for a Lifetime. She continues to serve as a member of the Senior Odyssey of Michigan Leadership Planning Team and Dementia Friendly Grand Rapids. Kimboko has recently been appointed to serve on the Clark Retirement Community Foundation Board of Directors.



Larry J. Robson, MD
*Surgeon,
Community Leader, Mentor*

NOW A RETIRED vascular and transplant surgeon, 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 GVSU Foundation, Health Net of West Michigan, and University of Michigan-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 is on the board for its Cardiovascular Center. He also dedicates time teaching vascular surgery at Spectrum health and mentoring GVSU 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.



Robbie D. McCollum
*Teacher, Event Planner,
Etiquette Coach*

ROBBIE MCCOLLUM retired from the Grand Rapids Public School District after 37 years of teaching Life Skills, Home Economics, Springboard to Leadership, and Conflict Resolution. Since her retirement, McCollum has spent time volunteering at New Hope Baptist Church where she serves as the Celebrations Ministry Chairperson, facilitates various bible study classes, and participates in the Women’s Ministry. McCollum’s motto is “The joy of the Lord is my strength.” She frequently visits senior living community Delaware Manor, providing dinner and entertainment for residents with other church members. In addition, McCollum is a professional event planner and etiquette coach. One event she particularly enjoyed working on is the “We Are the Experts of Us” conference, which “opened [her] eyes to the many senior community members who are indeed difference makers.” She is currently helping plan the Golden Anniversary for the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the 50th Class Reunion of the last graduating class of South High School. When not planning and teaching, McCollum assembles personal care packages for men and women who are in residential treatment facilities under the CASS Treatment Program.



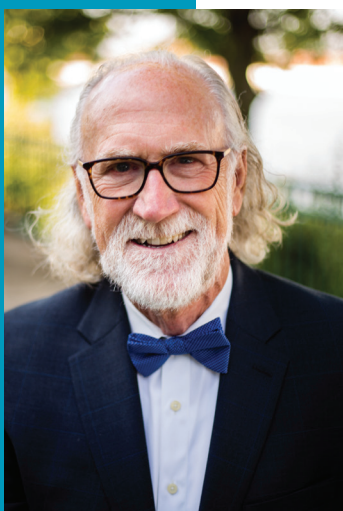
Donna Sterling
*Supporter, Aging Advocate,
Volunteer*

DONNA STERLING has one goal — “to honor God and show His love to others.” In her active pursuit to fulfill 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 — regardless 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 with older adults interested in the “CPA for Seniors” service. Although partaking in all of this, Sterling describes herself as someone who lives life quite simply.



Rev. Leonard McElveen
*Executive Leader, Activist,
Spiritual Guide*

REVEREND LEONARD MCELVEEN has been serving the homeless population for more than 30 years. Once a drug dealer who survived a near-fatal incident, McElveen became a Christian and now stands before the Grand Rapids community as an example of God’s amazing grace. “My joy today is proving that getting older is not a hindrance to growth and development. My best work is still in front of me,” he says. McElveen is currently the Vice President of Ministry and Outreach for Mel Trotter Ministries, where he leads partnership relations and lives out the mission of the organization by demonstrating the compassion of Christ, through rescue and restoration for anyone experiencing hunger and homelessness. McElveen often speaks throughout the Greater Grand Rapids Area at Sunday services, local colleges, and other events. He is also involved in the DeColores Retreat Community as a Spiritual Director where they hold six life-changing retreats each year.



Barry Van Dyck, Ph.D
*Education Architect,
Mentor, Runner*

RETIRING FROM BUILDING and leading business executive education programs at the University of Notre Dame in 2013 was far from the end of Barry Van Dyck’s career. With his 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 GVSU, Van Dyck plans on retiring (again) and continuing to volunteer with his wife, Pam.



Gwendolyn P. Nathan
*Community Volunteer,
Supporter, Connector*

GWENDOLYN 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 matter.” 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 the City of Grand Rapids, she connected customers with the right services and people as well as cared for everyone who came in 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 65th Celebration Gala 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.



Karen Weaver
*Teacher, Environmentalist,
Arts Enthusiast*

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 DisART — an extension of ArtPrize that embraces disabilities. One of Weaver’s biggest passions since childhood, however, has 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 by her amazing high school catechism students at Neland Avenue Church.