



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **East Lansing Educational Foundation Annual Awards Celebration Dinner**

The East Lansing Educational Foundation (ELEF) is celebrating their 40th anniversary at this year's Awards Celebration Dinner on Thursday May 2, 2024. Dinner tickets are \$75 each and raffle tickets are \$20 each. The deadline to purchase tickets is April 15, 2024 and can be purchased on-line at:

<https://elef.us/news-events/annual-awards-dinner>

In its nearly 40-year history, ELEF has funded more than \$925,000 in grants to the teachers and students of East Lansing Public Schools. This school year 44 grants were funded totaling \$70,000 in grant monies.

At the event the 2024 Awards Recipients will also be honored. These awardees are ELHS alumni who have achieved professional distinction at a national or international level or have an impact on the East Lansing community.

### ***2024 Award Recipients***

#### ***Distinguished Alumni Award***

##### ***Polo Reo Tate | ELHS Class Of 1995***

From a wide array of life experiences, [Polo REO Tate](#) intimately understands the infinite value in mindfully getting to know ourselves wholly and love ourselves unconditionally so that we may live in the freedom of our own authenticity.

An author by soul, actor by trade, artist at heart, and uplifter to the core of her being, this Joyful Warrior redefines what it means to be a Renaissance Woman. She has been a Division I athlete, a United States Air Force Academy Cadet, an actor and comedian performing all over the U.S. and Canada, a speaker who has keynoted across the country, a philanthropist with her family's foundation in Michigan, a writer, creator, lead facilitator and Board Chair elect for the enlightened leadership organization ATHENA International, and she has just finished authoring her third book entitled *WORTHY: How to live an ALL-IN, ALL-WIN life (full of authenticity, freedom, and fulfillment)*.

Her supreme love for people, and the clarity with which she sees and celebrates the superpowers of those around her, allows her to help elevate the energy of any relationship or situation in which she is present. She lives each moment to the fullest, lets no one take her joy, and avidly operates from the belief that we can do anything upon which we set our minds, hearts, and spirits

#### ***Outstanding Alumni Honor Roll***

##### ***Sonya Gunnings-Moton | ELHS Class of 1978***

Dr. Sonya Gunnings-Moton is a 1978 graduate of East Lansing High School. She went on to complete her bachelor's degree in human development and social policy from Northwestern University, and her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Michigan State University. She was the first Black Associate Dean appointed in the history of the College of Education at MSU and also served as Senior Advisor to the Provost. She provided university-wide leadership to advance MSU's commitment to urban community partnerships and engagement. Within the College of Education, Dr. Gunnings-Moton created the core urban education program efforts that continue within the college today. This includes the Urban Educators Cohort Program, the Urban Immersion Fellowship, and the Urban Partnership Pre-College Program. She served as Program Director for several major, multi-year, urban education partnership grants. Dr. Gunnings-Moton was honored with the Michigan State University, College of Education Distinguished Alumni Award. Her work has been credited as the catalyst for urban education efforts within the MSU College of Education, with a focus on ensuring all professional educator candidates understand the issues at stake in today's urban schools. Beyond the college, Dr. Gunnings-Moton was principal owner for over 30 years, along with her father, of Meridian Professional Psychological Consultants, P.C., an outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment facility in East Lansing. Now retired, Dr. Gunnings-Moton enjoys going to her son's, Taylor Moton, NFL games, and taking on the lifelong learning that comes with being a grandparent to her four grandchildren.

***East Lansing Educational Foundation Award***  
***Will Kopachik***

Growing up next to Cleveland Ohio's Metroparks and its Rocky River Valley he explored its rich flora and fauna and became a budding biologist at age seven. After a non-exceptional high school career, he found his path again at the University of Florida. Academic science was so attractive, he never wanted to leave. After a Ph.D. in Biology from Princeton University and postdoctoral research I joined the Department of Zoology faculty at Michigan State University in 1986. There I was fortunate to work with inspiring colleagues and bright students until retirement in 2015. My wife Annette, a radiologist, and I raised two daughters during our busy working careers but he started volunteering at MacDonald Middle School to co-coach the speech and debate club and help run a science project fair, Science-Palooza. In 2014 ELHS teacher, John Heinrich, told him about a need for a Science Olympiad club. They founded a club, and he worked as head coach until 2023; now tournament supervisor. He finds promoting science education and literacy in youths and awakening their innate interest and talent very fulfilling. It's also a pleasure to work with community-minded teachers and volunteer coaches who freely pass on their love of science and learning. Thanks also to ELEF for support that has been vital to the club's success.

***Distinguished Community Service Award (Theda Assiff Award)***  
***Dorinda Carter Andrews***

Dorinda Carter Andrews is a professor and chairperson of the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Her research is focused on Black education and racial equity and justice in P-20 learning environments. She examines issues of race, culture, and power in schools and works with school districts, state education agencies, universities, municipalities, corporations, and civic organizations on how to develop and maintain culturally responsive, inclusive, and equitable learning and work environments. She is a former industrial engineer and high school math teacher. In the East Lansing community, she developed and co-led the Social Justice Reading group for students in preschool to 5 th grade; facilitated several community forums to promote racial healing; and consulted with the school district for over 10 years on academic and social issues impacting Students of Color. Among numerous honors, Dr. Carter Andrews has given two TEDx talks on education – one entitled, “The Consciousness Gap in Education: An Equity Imperative” and another entitled, “Teach Kids to Be Eagles: Overcoming Educational Storms.” Her insights on racial equity in education have appeared in the New York Times, Education Week, and on WKAR, NPR, CNN, and other media outlets. In 2022 she was named the Educator of the Year by the Lansing Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

***Spartan Village GLOBAL Education Award***

***Mark Pontoni***

Mark Pontoni came to East Lansing High School mid-year in 2019 after teaching for 12 ½ years in northern Michigan. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan from which he holds a BA in Political Science and Masters Degrees in both Education and Political Science. Teaching is his second career after running a business in Ann Arbor which pioneered helping non-profits such as universities, cancer centers, public television, etc raise money through database marketing. He is married to Lisa, a retired teacher from Petoskey whom Mark credits as relegating him to be the second-best teacher in the household. He has three adult children, two step-children, and four grandchildren. At East Lansing High School, Mark has run the Model United Nations club which has opened new doors to our world for hundreds of ELHS students. He has also coached freshman baseball (after running varsity programs for years up north), and in 2023 took on coaching JV tennis. He has long been involved in leadership roles in various teacher unions, and he currently serves as the president of the East Lansing Education Association.

***Outstanding Philanthropist Award***

***Robert and Shelagh Miller***

Shelagh Ferguson-Miller received her BS degree in Biochemistry and Physiology from the University of Toronto and her PhD in Biochemistry from University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1971. She completed postdoctoral work at Oxford University UK where she met Bob. She returned to the US for further postdoctoral studies at Northwestern University before joining the faculty at Michigan State University in 1978. Her research has focused on the study of proteins that are required for energy generation in living organisms. Her group obtained some of the first high resolution x-ray structures of these proteins, providing new insight into the structural basis of biological energy production and how it is regulated in health and disease. Her contributions in research, teaching and administration (Chair of Biochemistry, 2003-2008) were recognized by a National Institutes of Health Merit Award and her appointment as University Distinguished Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Shelagh retired from MSU in 2020.

Robert Miller joined the elementary particle physics group at Michigan State University in 1978 after graduating from Purdue University and completing post-doctoral terms at the Rutherford Laboratory in England and at the Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois. His career at MSU included working with a collaboration that discovered the top quark at the Fermi Lab in Illinois, and with another collaboration that discovered the Higgs particle at the CERN Laboratory in Switzerland. Robert retired from MSU in 2003 but has continued his hobbies of woodworking, sailing and cooking. In the last few years he has enjoyed helping out with the Science Olympiad teams at the East Lansing High School.

Shelagh and Robert met in England and married in 1973, after returning to the US. They have three daughters who have graduated from East Lansing Public Schools and are now pursuing careers as MD and PhD scientists and are raising four grandsons.

The event is Thursday, May 2, 2024, 5:30-8:00p.m. at Eagle Eye Golf and Banquet Center. To purchase tickets, go to: <https://elef.us/news-events/annual-awards-dinner>



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