

Remarks of Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes (OHS Class of '63)

Accepting OEF's 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award

Good evening and thanks to each of you for being here tonight to support the students of Okemos and the Okemos Education Foundation. This evening could only have been better had our dinner menu included those blueberry pancakes that were so tasty over 60 years ago when my parents brought me to the Kellogg Center for Sunday morning breakfast!



On a serious note, thank you for selecting me as this year's recipient of the OEF Distinguished Alumni Award. Also thanks to the Okemos Alumni Association for nominating me for this award.

This year's banquet again honors Okemos Public Schools teachers for their excellence in education. Tonight, as I look back on my years at OHS and a 40+ year career working on agricultural development issues in the developing world, I recall with fondness three Okemos High teachers who taught me skills that proved highly useful in my career. While I can't personally thank each of those three teachers this evening, I would like to briefly honor their memory.

- The first teacher, **Bertha Mosher**, was my Spanish teacher. She set me on the road to becoming fluent in Spanish. This proved a real asset five years after graduating from OHS, when MSU hired me to work on a study of the agricultural marketing system in Colombia's Cauca Valley.



Bertha Mosher (Spanish)

- The second teacher, **Joy Moore**, was my typing teacher. She set me on the road to becoming a very fast touch typist which has proved to be a really practical on-the-job skill.



Joy Moore (Typing)

The third teacher, **Dale Brubaker**, taught American Government during the fall of my senior year at OHS. While Brubaker probably complied with the requisite curriculum, he otherwise “threw out the textbook” and had his students reading issue-oriented books such as John Griffin’s *Black Like Me* and JFK’s *Profiles in Courage*. How could reading these books not make one more aware of and interested in social issues?



Dale Brubaker (American Government)

In 2011, I began to write vignettes about celebrities (the famous) I had encountered during my travels. Just to drop a few names, the famous included MSU President John Hannah, Secretary of State John Kerry, Nobel Prize Laureate Norman Borlaug, Pope John Paul II, Spartan and Lakers great Magic Johnson, Oscar-winning composer Ennio Morricone, Exotica musician Martin Denny, and so many more.

I also wrote about the not-so-famous people who had influenced the course of my professional career. One of those “not-so-famous” was former OHS teacher **Dale Brubaker**. While I hadn’t been in touch with Brubaker since taking his American Government class in 1963, a Google search in 2011 turned up his email address. Replying to my first email, Dale wrote:

“Your letter is precisely the kind of thing that a teacher lives for and I thank you for it. Your kind words captured what I tried to do at OHS in my three years there. I was well into my Ph.D. program at MSU and wanted to involve students in the kind of inquiry that social scientists and persons in the humanities did rather than simply ingesting their results in texts.”

Following those initial emails, we struck up an email exchange over the next two years. I shared with Dale draft vignettes I had written about the famous and the not-so-famous. He quickly again became a mentor, commented on my drafts, offered ideas to improve my writing, and encouraged me to write an autobiography. He motivated me to crank out a near final memoir that I titled “Giants in Their Realms.” In mid-2013, I tried to email Dale to share a draft of “Giants” with him but he didn’t reply. I tried to phone and leave a message but received no reply. Then, one Saturday, I again phoned and Dale’s wife, Barbara, answered. On identifying my name, Barbara said Dale had told her about me. I replied that I was calling to get a mailing address to send the “Giants” draft to Dale. She replied that Dale had died just two days before after a long battle with cancer.

I owe a debt of gratitude to those three OHS teachers – **Dale Brubaker, Joy Moore, and Bertha Mosher** – from whom I acquired knowledge and skills that would become so helpful to me in my career. Thanks also this evening to all Okemos teachers, the OEF, and the OAA for all that you do to improve educational opportunities for the students of Okemos who, all too soon, will be the future alumni of Okemos Public Schools.

Hopefully, each OHS teacher here tonight will also inspire your students to go out into the world, do great things, and make you proud that they were once your student. Indeed, I hope that one day a former OHS student will be standing here to tell the audience that you were the OHS teacher who most inspired him or her.

Finally – and you know that when a speaker say “finally,” that’s probably not going to be the only “finally!” But, finally, let me acknowledge the OHS alumni and teachers who were with me this evening at the OAA-sponsored table:

- Sky Tribell (Class of '68 and OAA Vice President)
- Jill (Slocum) Tribbel (Cass of '68)
- Tom Rubendunst (Class of '75)
- Cathy (Owens) Rubendunst (Class of '79)
- Whitney Duffield (OHS Economics Teacher)
- Brynn Hawks (OHS Economics Teacher)
- Rod Ellis (Class of '65 and OAA President)

In closing, permit me to mention that my autobiography – “[Giants](#)” – is now available in the Alumni Library on the Okemos Alumni Association web site and that the OAA is in the process of donating the printed version of “Giants” to the OHS Library.

Thank you and good evening to all! Go Chiefs!!



Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes

STATE OF MICHIGAN



SPECIAL TRIBUTE

To

KERRY J. BYRNES, Ph.D.
Okemos Education Foundation
2018 Distinguished Alumni Award


LET IT BE KNOWN, That it is with great respect and gratitude that we present this tribute to Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes for his accomplishments as he receives the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award. The award recognizes Okemos Public Schools alumni who demonstrate exceptional achievement and dedication to humanitarian efforts.

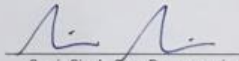
Kerry holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology and a Master's degree in communication from Michigan State University. He earned his Ph.D. in sociology from Iowa State University and has spent over 40 years providing technical leadership to development initiatives in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

He began his career with the International Fertilizer Development Center's Agro-Economic Division, where he later became a consultant to various clients including the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Pakistan Forestry Planning and Development Project. For almost three decades, Dr. Byrnes served in a variety of capacities in agricultural and development work as an advisor with Chemonics International, a Foreign Service Officer with USAID, and Senior Program Specialist to USAID's Bureau for Latin America and Caribbean where he played a leading role on the USAID-funded Agricultural and Rural Development Technical Services Project. He was honored with the USAID Administrator's Outstanding Career Achievement Award for his work on this particular effort in 2014. Dr. Byrnes officially retired from USAID soon thereafter as an Agricultural Development Officer.

Throughout his distinguished career, Dr. Byrnes has honorably represented Okemos Public Schools as an alumnus. He has served as an example for past and current students alike by demonstrating the utmost dedication to his profession while offering outstanding leadership in international development initiatives.

IN SPECIAL TRIBUTE, Therefore, this document is signed and dedicated to Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes as the recipient of the 2018 OEF Distinguished Alumni Award. We extend our best wishes as he continues his commendable work and service.


Curtis Hertel, Jr., State Senator
The Twenty-Third District


Samir Singh, State Representative
The Sixty-Ninth District

The Ninety-Ninth Legislature
At Lansing
Thursday, November 15, 2018



Special Tribute from The State of Michigan