

Okemos Alumni Association
Nominating Kerry J. Byrnes, Okemos Class of 1963
for the Distinguished Alumni Award
an Award of the Okemos Education Foundation

“The Alumni Award honors an alumnus of Okemos Public Schools who demonstrates exceptional dedication, achievement and humanitarian contributions. Additionally, it honors alumni who have pursued a passion and made a significant contribution to their field of study.”

--Okemos Education Foundation

Dr. Byrnes is a highly accomplished alumnus with a renaissance of interests. He was an Eagle Scout and East Lansing mayor for a day. In high school, his interests and achievements were focused on English, Spanish and American Government having been most inspired by the remarkable teacher, Dale Brubaker. Brubaker continued to be an inspiration until his death in 2016, encouraging Kerry to write “Giants in Their Realm”, an autobiographical account of Kerry’s experiences with world figures, leaders and personalities he encountered through his work and outside interests.

Kerry went from Okemos grad to Iowa State Ph.D. and a career supervisor for USAID. There, he studied, trained and developed 170 agricultural and rural projects, that included farming operations and complete market trade systems in 37 countries. A lifelong career of international travel, always trying to make this world a better place, especially for those who yet live in poverty in the developing world. Kerry received many honors for his work accomplishments as an analyst, supervisor and advisor. Awards such as “USDA Hurricane Reconstruction Plan”, “FAS Hurricane Recovery Team”, “USAID Meritorious Service, Meritorious Unit-Trade”, ”CAFTA Trade Negotiations”, GS-15 (the highest level in the Federal Civil Service) and upon retirement in September 2014, the USAID 2nd highest recognition, “Outstanding Career Achievement Award”.

The legacy and impact of Kerry’s USAID career was best summed up by John Thomas, a colleague and Development Officer: “Dr. Byrnes is among the most respected and knowledgeable persons I turn to for information and advice on agriculture and food security programming. He is especially strong in agriculture policy and trade matters. He provides balanced and clear analysis on the impact of policy and trade decisions on production, job creation, income growth and poverty reduction in developing country agriculture and regional economies.”

After earning his M.A. in 1968 from MSU, Kerry was hired by the MSU Economics Department to work on the Colombia Agricultural Marketing Research project where his findings were

incorporated into the final report. That project turned around the poorly underdeveloped subsistence ag system of Cali, Colombia into a thriving modern supermarket/hypermarket in a now developing country. Cali's retail food system is today the most successful producer/supplier/food retailer system in Colombia. And a reputation that would follow him throughout his career in Rural International Development. At retirement in 2014, Dr. Byrnes donated all his professional papers to the Agricultural Communication Documentation Center at the University of Illinois.

In between the M.A. and Ph.D. he was a VISTA volunteer for a year-and-a-half, working as a teacher's assistant in a Miami Head Start program and by night teaching English to the community speaking Spanish and Creole.

Kerry's passion for hard work and study went in many directions. He is a member of the Society for the Preservation for Film Music. As such, he has amassed nearly 2,000 film music soundtrack LP's and 2,100 CD's. The collection so complete that he recently donated the CD's to the MSU College of Music to support developing instructional curricula on film music composition. Since 1990, he has published several magazine articles about film music, including, "Martin Denny", "Scoring 'Spaghetti'", "Mr. Cook-the still-controversial film music critic".

As an early member of the Okemos Alumni Association, we invited Kerry to submit a memoir of his career and interests...we have now posted three books, with the latest revision of *Giants in Their Realms...* now up to 1,200 pages! He is currently working on a book-length chronicle of "The Chieftain Twelve" – the twelve Okemos High School basketball players who, after high school, played basketball for Michigan State University.

Kerry Byrnes from the class of 1963, shows exceptional dedication, high achievement, and always humanitarian contributions. An alumnus with great passion for making a significant contribution to every field of study he pursues. Truly, a distinguished alumnus.

On behalf of the Okemos Alumni Association, with unanimous consent,

Rodney D. Ellis, Class of 1965, Okemos Alumni Association President August 16, 2018

"Whatever impact Okemos had on him, Kerry has gone into the world and done good (not well, but good, which is better by far.) In terms of why we do these awards at all, I think it is important not to be too impressed with whiz-bang science stuff as opposed to the conscious application of effort and intelligence to improve the collective good. Kerry passes."

--OAA Board Member, David Winters '65

"Working behind the scenes and often in obscurity, Kerry is an Okemos gift to the world. From Eagle Scout to VISTA Volunteer to relief of poverty on a global scale, Kerry has positively

impacted the lives of millions. His touching tribute to his H.S. Teacher and his chronicle of Okemos basketball players, will immortalize others...the OHS Alumni seek the same honor for the author.”

--OAA Board Member, Rod Ellis '65