



Leslie Public Schools Foundation Newsletter

June 2026

Alumni Spotlight

Kerry Dack ~ Class of 1991

For Leslie graduate Kerry Dack (Class of 1991), the memories that stand out most are often the simplest ones: gathering with friends before class, cheering at sporting events, and being part of a school community where everyone knew and supported one another.



“Leslie is a small town that really shaped me,” Kerry said. “We all knew each other, and everybody supported one another.”

Kerry credits several teachers and mentors with helping build his confidence and character. Among the most influential were Mrs. Vasher who encouraged him to develop leadership skills as a senior camp counselor, Miss Val (Vallillee) who challenged him to participate in the school play, and Mr. Allender, who trusted him to help other students in the woodshop.

“I never would have thought I’d get up on stage,” Kerry laughed. “But it taught me to try new things and not be afraid to put yourself out there.”

That willingness to embrace new opportunities became a defining theme throughout his life.

Kerry and his wife, Jen, have three children: Tyler (Class of 2014), Haley (Class of 2016), and Graci (Class of 2019), and one grandchild, Daniel.

After graduation, Kerry joined the family business, Homecrest Manor in

Leslie. Purchased by his parents in 1983, Homecrest evolved from a 12-bed adult foster care home into a residential program serving individuals with developmental disabilities. Kerry and Jen eventually took over the business and have spent decades helping create a caring and supportive community for approximately 20 residents.

“We’ve always loved working with people and hearing their stories,” Kerry said. “Sometimes all it takes is listening to someone and helping them feel included.”

For Kerry, Homecrest has never been simply about operating a business. It has been about helping residents become active members of the Leslie community.

Over the years, Homecrest has built strong connections through local partnerships, volunteer opportunities, and community activities. Kerry has seen the field shift toward greater community inclusion, helping individuals with developmental disabilities participate fully in everyday life rather than remain isolated from the communities around them.

“Our residents are part of this community,” Kerry said. “They regularly participate in bowling outings, movie nights, shopping trips, church events, and Meals on Wheels deliveries throughout the Leslie area.”

Each Monday, Homecrest residents help deliver meals to shut-ins across the community. Kerry says it has become one of the most meaningful parts of their week.

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Director's Corner

*Cindy Farley
Executive Director*

One of the greatest joys of putting together each newsletter is hearing the stories of the people who have helped shape Leslie Public Schools over the years. This month, as I reflected on our Staff Spotlight featuring retired business educator Carol VanDyke, I found myself thinking about my own experience as one of her students.

I had the opportunity to take all of Carol's business classes, and I can honestly say those skills served me well throughout my career. At the time, I may not have fully appreciated the importance of keyboarding, bookkeeping, and business fundamentals, but those lessons became valuable tools that I used long after graduation.

As I interviewed Carol for the newsletter, I couldn't help but think about the many other Leslie graduates whose careers and lives were shaped by the practical skills, confidence, and work ethic she instilled in her students. Carol's high expectations challenged us to do our best and prepared us for success in ways we did not always recognize at the time.

Her story is a wonderful reminder of the lasting impact educators have on the lives of their students. The influence of a great teacher often extends far beyond the classroom, shaping careers, building confidence, and opening doors to future opportunities.

Staff Spotlight Carol VanDyke

For more than 30 years, generations of Leslie students entered Carol VanDyke's classroom to learn typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, and business skills.



What many may not have realized at the time was how much those lessons would influence their futures.

"I wanted students to have skills they could use anywhere, anytime," Carol said. "College is not for everyone, but everyone deserves the opportunity to support themselves."

Carol taught business education at Leslie Public Schools for 31 years, retiring in 1994. During her career, she taught in three different high school buildings and remained committed to helping students build practical skills and confidence.

Originally from Holland, Michigan, Carol attended college in Illinois before spending a year at the prestigious Katharine Gibbs School in New York City, a nationally known secretarial training school, where expectations were high and professionalism was emphasized daily.

"We had to wear skirts, heels, coats, and white gloves," she recalled. "You couldn't leave until you met the minimum requirements in every subject."

Those experiences helped shape the expectations she later brought to her Leslie classroom.

After graduating from Central Michigan University, Carol came to Leslie when a teaching opportunity became available. What began as a career move quickly became home.

"There were good people here," Carol said. "Leslie was the right size community, close enough to larger cities, but still a place where people cared about one another."

Throughout her career, Carol taught shorthand, typing, bookkeeping, and

business classes to students in grades 9–12. She also served as senior class advisor, supported numerous extracurricular activities, and chaperoned student trips, including European travel experiences with French classes.

The most rewarding part of teaching, however, came after graduation.

"I knew I was making a difference when former students would come back and tell me how much they used those skills," she said.

One former student recently thanked her for insisting that keyboarding mattered.

"She told me, 'I hated typing class, but I use it every single day now,'" Carol laughed.

Long before email and spreadsheets became everyday necessities, Carol was teaching skills that prepared students for careers in business, banking, office administration, and countless other professions.

Known as a strict but caring teacher, Carol believes high expectations helped students succeed.

"My being strict was an asset for them, even if they didn't realize it at the time," she said.

She also remembers students who overcame difficult circumstances to achieve success.

"You never know what a student is dealing with," she said. "Sometimes the students you least expect become the most successful."

Today, Carol enjoys traveling, reading, sewing, crafting, and spending time with family. When asked to describe Leslie in one word, her answer came quickly:

"Amazing."

Looking back on her 31 years in the classroom, Carol VanDyke's influence extends far beyond typing and bookkeeping. Her commitment to helping students build practical skills and confidence continues to be reflected in the lives and careers of Leslie graduates today.

How You Can Help

Behind every successful school community are people who believe in its future. Through the support of alumni, parents, community members, and friends of Leslie Public Schools, the Foundation continues to provide resources and opportunities that enhance the educational experience for students and staff.

Your generosity helps turn ideas into opportunities for students.

Every gift, regardless of size, helps fund classroom mini-grants, recognize outstanding alumni and educators, and support programs that make a lasting impact. Thank you for investing in Leslie Public Schools and helping build a lasting legacy of opportunity for Blackhawks.

How To Give

Choose the Giving Tier that's right for you:

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Alumni Spotlight

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"They love being able to help other people," he said. "It gives them purpose and connection."

One of the most rewarding aspects of Kerry's career has been mentoring both residents and younger staff members. In recent years, he has stepped into a semi-retirement role, allowing newer employees to assume leadership responsibilities while he continues to offer guidance and support.

"I enjoy sharing my experiences with younger people," he said. "I think that goes back to the teachers at Leslie. They always encouraged us and believed in us."

Outside of work, Kerry has remained involved in youth activities, coaching basketball and soccer and volunteering with church youth programs and camps. He strongly believes in supporting young people and helping them discover their strengths.

"Kids just need somebody," he said. "Sometimes they need encouragement. Sometimes they just need someone to listen."

"Don't be afraid to try things," Kerry said. "Listen to people who believe in you because sometimes others can see talents in us that we don't see ourselves."

He also encourages young people to pursue work they enjoy and remain connected to their communities.

"Find something you care about," he said. "Whether it's relationships, work, or family, it all takes maintenance, but it's worth it."

Even now, Kerry and Jen remain active members of the Leslie community, supporting local activities and cheering on the next generation of Black-hawks.

"I just love Leslie," Kerry said with a smile.

Alumni like Kerry Dack represent the very best of the Leslie community. They continue to serve others, invest in young people, and create opportunities for inclusion, compassion, and connection long after graduation day.

School of Choice Leslie Public Schools

Looking for a great place to learn, grow, and belong?

Discover what Leslie Public Schools has to offer!

- ⇒ Caring teachers
- ⇒ Strong academics
- ⇒ Extracurricular opportunities
- ⇒ Small-town pride and community support

Ready to get started?

Visit lesliek12.net and select Enrollment / School of Choice to complete the Request Form.

For questions, please contact Joan Beachey at 517-589-8200 ext. 101.

**Choose Leslie
Choose Opportunity**

Visit us at the Leslie Fall Festival

It may only be the beginning of summer, but our next newsletter will not be published until September, so we wanted to give you an early reminder to visit the Leslie Public Schools Foundation booth at the Leslie Fall Festival on Saturday, September 12.

Stop by to learn more about the Foundation, meet board members, and see how we are supporting students, staff, and educational opportunities throughout Leslie Public Schools.

While you're there, be sure to purchase a 50/50 raffle ticket and enter our basket raffle for a chance to win some great prizes. Proceeds help support the Foundation's mission and the programs we provide for Leslie students and educators.

We look forward to seeing you at the Fall Festival.

Board Member Spotlight Elisabeth "Beth" Yeider

Beth Yeider joined the Leslie Public Schools Foundation Board in 2021 with a simple goal: to give back to the community she has always called home.

A proud Leslie High School Class of 1999 graduate, Beth has deep roots in the community. She has spent 22 years with Independent Bank, where she



serves as Branch Manager, and her dedication to service extends beyond her professional career.

In addition to her role with the Foundation, Beth currently serves on the Leslie Board of Education, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Development Authority, and the Highfields Board.

Beth says her desire to serve Leslie and give back to the town that shaped her led her to join the Foundation.

"This is my hometown, and I want to make a difference," she said.

Since joining the Foundation, Beth has focused on learning more about its mission and identifying opportunities to help it grow. The Foundation supports students and teachers by providing educational resources and opportunities while strengthening the connection between the schools and the community.

Looking ahead, Beth hopes to increase awareness of the Foundation and inspire more community members to get involved.

"The more people know about what the Foundation does and how they can get involved, the more impact we can have," she said.

For Beth, the greatest reward of serving as a trustee is supporting Leslie Public Schools students, staff, and families while giving back to the community that has supported her.

Alumni Business Owner Spotlight Monica (Lantz) Mays (Class of 1995)

For Monica Lantz Mays, Leslie High School Class of 1995, success has never been measured solely by sales



numbers. Instead, it has been built on relationships, trust, hard work, and a genuine desire to help others.

Today, Monica is co-owner of The Mortgage Chicks, Fueled by M3 Mortgage, a woman-owned mortgage lending company that helps individuals and families purchase homes, refinance mortgages, and navigate one of life's biggest financial decisions. Although the company is only in its third year of ownership, Monica brings more than 30 years of experience in the title and mortgage industry.

Ironically, business ownership was never part of Monica's original plan.

"I thought I was going to be a high school math teacher," she said with a laugh.

Instead, shortly after graduating from Leslie, she entered the mortgage industry and discovered a career that relied on many of the same skills great teachers possess: listening, educating, building trust, and helping people understand complex information.

Monica and her business partner launched The Mortgage Chicks with a simple goal: to provide exceptional service, competitive programs, and personalized guidance throughout the lending process. They wanted their reputation to be built on who they are and how they treat people.

Every business goal they have set has been met or exceeded—an accomplishment Monica is especially proud of as a woman business owner in a competitive, commission-based industry. When asked what contributes

most to her success, Monica points to relationships. She believes her role is not only to secure financing but also to help clients feel confident throughout the process. Many customers return years later or refer friends and family because of the trust she has built.

Her business philosophy was shaped by mentors who demonstrated the importance of integrity, compassion, and faith. Monica believes successful business owners must work hard, adapt to change, and understand their strengths and weaknesses.

"You can't be everything to everyone all the time," Monica explained. "Knowing your strengths and weaknesses is important."

Her Leslie roots also shaped her approach to business. Growing up in a small town taught her the value of community, personal connections, and treating people with kindness and respect.

"People remember how you treat them," she said.

That philosophy extends beyond her business. Monica remains active through local sponsorships, school events, chamber activities, and church involvement. She and her high school sweetheart and husband, Dave Mays (LHS Class of 1994), are the proud parents of three Leslie graduates, Chelsea (2015), Trey (2016), and Brody (2024), and enjoy spending time with their three grandchildren.

For current Leslie students considering entrepreneurship, Monica encourages them to pursue their passions, discover their strengths, and remain open to unexpected opportunities.

Her story is a reminder that success often comes not from following the path you planned, but from using your gifts, building meaningful relationships, and staying true to your values.

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