



SEVEN OAKS  
EDUCATION FOUNDATION INC.

# Foundation

NEWS

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## Behind the Board

*Meet a few faces working behind the scenes at the Foundation*



Front Row: Cory Juan, Pat Stefanchuk, Margaret Brett, Fran Taylor, Ajit Kaur Deol O.M.  
Back Row: Avrum Senensky, Irv Simmonds, Bernie Gowryluk, Wayne Shimizu, Ted Ash and Kraig Hillis

When you think of the Seven Oaks Education Foundation, it's only natural to think about scholarships and how they benefit students pursuing a post-secondary education.

But what about the Board of Directors who volunteer their time and energy behind the scenes to help ensure that those scholarships continue?

Here are five of those Board members who took a little time to talk about how they became part of the Board, and why they choose to do what they do to help students pursue their post-secondary education.

## Avrum Senensky



If you ask Avrum Senensky how he came to be a Board member, he'll give you a simple answer: he was asked.

"I was actively involved in the Garden City Collegiate 50th Anniversary Reunion - my wife Cheryl was one of the co-chairs," says Avrum.

"This event turned out to be a great fundraiser for SOEF, and afterward, Harriet Zaidman asked if I would be interested in sitting on the Board of SOEF. There was no hesitation on my part. I view it as a way to give back to a great community."

Avrum was himself a recipient of the \$50 O.V. Jewitt Memorial Scholarship for having the highest mark in Math 300 at Garden City Collegiate back in 1975.

"The fact I remember the name and the amount of the scholarship all these years later indicates the lasting impression receiving this scholarship had on me."

He's not the only one in his family with that direct experience with awards and scholarships.

"My eldest son David received numerous awards and scholarships when he graduated from Garden City in 2009 and will be graduating next year with an Actuarial Mathematics and a Double Finance degree from the Asper School of Business," says a

proud Avrum. "And my youngest son, Josh will be graduating with honours from Garden City Collegiate this year. He will be receiving an entrance scholarship from the University of Manitoba and will be attending the Asper School of Business in the fall."

Why does Avrum see scholarships as being such a vital part of education?

"I view scholarships as having two main benefits. First, they are an award for excellence, acknowledging the accomplishments of the students. Second, they are a motivator, inspiring students to continue on with their education.

"I am a very strong believer in the importance of post-secondary education. A higher education is perhaps the most valuable gift that you can give your children. The work of the Foundation provides motivation and opportunities for the students in the Seven Oaks School Division."

## Irv Simmonds



When Irv Simmonds was contacted about being a Board member in 2002, he agreed immediately.

"It was an invitation that I couldn't say no to as I received a \$100 bursary from the Scholarship Board when I graduated from Garden City Collegiate in 1976," recalls Irv who has remained on the Board ever since.

"I was very honored to receive the bursary and to be presented the bursary by Ben Zaidman, who was involved with the Scholarship Board for many years.

"It was a great help as tuition and student fees for first year at the University of Manitoba in September, 1976 were \$492 so the bursary paid for over 20% of those costs."

Times may have changed since Irv received his bursary, but the role such awards play hasn't diminished. Irv needn't look further than his own children who are currently attending schools in the Division. His eldest daughter, Rannah, graduated from West Kildonan Collegiate in 2011 with a first year entrance scholarship from the University of Winnipeg. His daughter, Corene, is graduating from West Kildonan Collegiate this June and his son, Stuart is currently in Grade 9. Irv's wife, Terry, also attended H.C. Avery, Jefferson Junior High School and Garden City Collegiate.

For Irv, this first-hand experience with scholarships, bursaries and awards has reaffirmed his belief in the importance of their role in today's education.

"I believe that in addition to appreciating the monetary assistance, students gain an understanding that what they do, both in school and outside of school, is important... and that it is recognized by their teachers, the school division and the community."

In Irv's opinion, the community component is a key one.

"It is important that people in the community get involved with the Foundation by volunteering, making donations, supporting Foundation events and helping to solicit donations from friends, families and businesses.

“By donating and supporting the Foundation it can support more students with scholarships as they pursue post-secondary education.”

## Harriet Zaidman



In her role as a Foundation Board member, Harriet Zaidman leads by example – something she learned by following the example set by her own parents.

“I’m a lifelong Seven Oaks resident. I went to Seven Oaks, Collicutt, R.F. Morrison, Jefferson Junior High and Garden City Collegiate. My parents were active in parent-teacher associations when I was young and my father, Ben Zaidman, was a school trustee for 29 years.”

Not surprisingly, with her parents being such an active part of the Division, Harriet gained a lot of insight into education in Seven Oaks.

“I grew up hearing about the work of the Seven Oaks School Board and the then-Seven Oaks Scholarship Board, and understood the importance and value of advancing educational possibilities for youth,” says Harriet. “My own three children were recipients of scholarships, which relieved their financial burden in university.”

“I wanted to support and advance that work as a tribute to my parents, to my kids and to the community.”

Now, as a teacher herself (though not in the Seven Oaks School Division), Harriet sees first-hand the need for supporting young people as they follow their dreams and strive to fulfill their potential.

“A scholarship can inspire potential!” says Harriet. “It can allow a student to explore his/her possible career choices, and reduce the strain that higher education now puts on students and their families.”

“A scholarship also inspires self-confidence - not just within the family, but it demonstrates the school and community think this student can achieve great things. It’s a morale booster.”

Harriet’s son David is himself an example of a scholarship winner who has gone on to achieve great things. A Maples graduate, David is today a lawyer who has had the opportunity to work all over the world and has since returned to Canada and work at Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP in at Toronto.

Though she clearly has a multitude of personal reasons for being an SOEF Board member, there’s one that Harriet believes is the reason more people in the Seven Oaks Community should be actively involved with the Foundation.

“Young people are the future and we need to support them in their pursuit of whatever goal they have – to build an educated, advanced society, whether that education is community college, university or other educational institution.”

With that in mind, Harriet encourages people to show their encouragement through donations and volunteer work with the SOEF when needed, just as she and her fellow board members do.

## Kraig Hillis



Some Board members had a long history and deep understanding of the role the Seven Oaks Education Foundation plays in the Division. For Kraig Hillis, however, it was a bit different.

“To be quite honest, my knowledge of the Board was quite limited and it was a friend of mine, Mario Coquete, who actually put my name forward to join the Board,” explains Kraig. “Mario had been on the Board for several years at that point and explained the work the Board was doing in Seven Oaks.”

Though he didn’t entirely know what to expect at the time, Kraig saw it as a way to give back to the community where he grew up.

“My family has been in West Kildonan since the early 1950s,” says Kraig. “My father, uncle, aunts all attended various schools within the Division as did both myself and my wife. I also currently have two children in the Division; my son is finishing Grade 11 at West Kildonan Collegiate and my daughter is attending Edmund Partridge and is in Grade 6.”

Kraig's roots in the community extend beyond living in the Division. His business has an equally long history in Seven Oaks.

"Our family business, Hillis Insurance Agencies Ltd., is on to the third generation and our 50th year of serving the community here in West Kildonan."

Now going into his third year on the Board, Kraig feels he has a far better understanding of the important work of the Foundation and the responsibility Board members have to the students of Seven Oaks.

"One important thing that I think awards and scholarships do is reward students for the hard work and perseverance that they have shown throughout their time in school, especially the high school years. Everyone likes a pat on the back for a job well done and by recognizing students in this way, we are contributing to that."

"The monetary help is always appreciated, I'm sure, but the support we provide, I feel, goes beyond that. At least that is the feeling I have gotten from reading the correspondence our Board has received from students who have been recipients of awards or scholarships from the SOEF."

And what about the role of the community?

"That is a very good question. The community is already helping by supporting the students with various fundraisers at the schools, be it plays, BBQs and other fundraising events. But they can continue to help by donating to the SOEF, so we as a Board can continue dispersing the monetary rewards to our students, maybe even increase the amounts of each and the number provided.

"Ultimately the goal is to have all students of Seven Oaks be given the opportunity to attend post-secondary education."

## Steve Medwick



You might say Steve Medwick is pretty familiar with the Seven Oaks School Division; he's been a high school Principal and teacher in the Division for 39 years.

That "front line" experience is what inspired him to join the Seven Oaks Education Foundation Board of Directors.

"I feel it is important that both Educators and Community Members give back to the Division and help support our young students as potential future educators and members of the Community," says Steve.

Steve was himself recognized as Garden City Collegiate's Male Athlete of the Year in 1970, his graduating year.

"It was an honour to be recognized as there were many worthy candidates that year," he recalls.

Although Steve is Principal of Garden City Collegiate, it's Maples Collegiate that is the unofficial family school. Steve's four sons also all graduated from Maples Collegiate. In fact, his third son, Matthew received both academic and football scholarships

upon graduating. Today, he's head of the Phys Ed. Department at West Kildonan Collegiate, adding another family connection to the Division.

Through his day-to-day experiences as a teacher, principal and father, Steve has seen how scholarships, bursaries and awards make a difference to students – and he can attest to how the value is far more than monetary.

"It's recognition of their hard work and dedication towards learning," says Steve. "This recognition is important in front of their peers, their parents and also their teachers.

"This kind of recognition improves overall self-esteem and hopefully it helps the drive to be continuous learners and strong role models for their younger siblings and friends."

Like his fellow Board Members, Steve also knows that community involvement is what helps to make scholarships, awards and bursaries continue to be available.

"Community can be involved in a number of ways," says Steve. "People can support Foundation and School Events. They can join the Foundation and spread the word about the great work that the Foundation is doing for the Seven Oaks community.

And, of course, they can encourage the young people to get involved as they grow and to pass this on to other members of the community."



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