

# CEF HONORED ALUMNUS **BRYAN HARRISON**

CALEDONIA HIGH SCHOOL  
CLASS OF 1986



## **BRYAN AT**

## **CALAPALOOZA**

- Homecoming Parade at 5:00 P.M.
- Award Presentation at 5:45 P.M. – main stage
- Honored at Football Game halftime

## **EARLY YEARS**

Lifelong resident, Bryan Harrison, recalls a simpler time when Caledonia was a small community with woods, water, fields, and farms. Kids belonged to 4H and FFA and a trip to the county fair was a highlight of the summer. School was small enough that everyone knew each other and were friends. Football games were the highlight of the week and sports brought the people of the community together.

Bryan recalls fond memories of all day Independence Day celebrations held at Lakeside Park following the annual parade. The day included entertainment onstage, the American Legion had a chicken BBQ, and the fireworks were shot over the lake at dusk. Homecoming was and still is a true celebration of Caledonia students and families. Back then, it consisted of Spirit Week, a parade, football game, and a dance. Today Calapalooza takes that community spirit which incorporates the traditions of the past and expands it to an even bigger celebration. Halloween trick or treating in the village was a time that Bryan always looked forward to. Seeing all your friends, “the Townies,” was part of the fun! Lastly, Bryan reminisced about the tradition of riding bikes to school during the last week of school. He lived 7 or 8 miles from school so several kids from the Morse Lake neighborhood would be seen peddling down 100th Street into town. Back then kids could safely ride bikes pretty much anywhere.

Bryan attended Caledonia schools from Caledonia Elementary up through high school which was at the Duncan Lake building at the time. Bryan remarked, “For a small rural community, I had excellent teachers throughout my entire education. I was voted class clown so I have an even deeper appreciation for my teachers that had the patience to make sure I picked up some knowledge between wisecracks and pranks.”

Bryan remembers many of his teachers very fondly and is grateful for the lessons learned from them and the lasting impacts they had on him. Kim Klingensmith was his 5th grade English teacher and used music from the Beatles and James Taylor in her lessons. Mrs. Crump taught her students the hustle in gym class. In 8th grade, Mr. Downer would

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bring world history to life in the classroom. In 9th grade, Stan Spencer taught Michigan history with humor and instilled in Bryan a deeper appreciation for all of its offerings. Al Steeby led the FFA program and also taught Agriscience and Agribusiness. Al and this program had a profound impact on Bryan's identity and success. He reminisced, "I not only learned the differences between hay and straw and how to tell a Holstein and a Hereford; I also learned how to weld and back up a trailer, public speaking and parliamentary procedure, and how to field dress a deer." Bryan was blessed to have John Soderman, one of the most successful coaches of all time, as a gym teacher and cross country and track coach. For four years under John's leadership, Bryan learned to train hard and expect to win. The teams did indeed win and during the 4 years in both cross country and track, they never lost a conference dual meet. Bryan earned varsity letters in track (4), cross country(4), and wrestling (2). He was All-Conference in track and All-Conference Honorable Mention in cross country. He also sang in the honors choir and won several FFA awards in state competitions.

"I can remember one track meet where it literally came down to the final relay to determine the winner of the meet and I was a member of the relay team," Bryan recalls. "We were running against a foursome that had beaten us in an earlier event at a different distance. I can remember gathering my teammates and telling them that we would not be the guys that broke Coach Soderman's years long undefeated record. We were just kids but I knew even before the starter's gun went off that we would win. We had heart. We cared about each other, the team, and community pride. I can remember all my classmates rushing the field rejoicing. My father had a saying, 'Respect all. Fear none,' and sportsmanship was more important to him than winning. After winning the race I made sure I shook hands with every member of the relay squad we had just bested."

## COLLEGE YEARS

After graduating in 1986 from Caledonia High School, Bryan attended Grand Rapids Junior College for two years and earned his Associates of Arts degree. He believes community colleges provide a foundation of learning at an affordable price and was glad he avoided a lot of the debt that students take on at a 4 year university. From there Bryan went on to attend Michigan State University to study child development and elementary education. While there, one of his dad's former students, Dick Posthumus was a State Senator so he helped Bryan get a job as a Page running errands for offices. This was before the internet so he would take copies of proposed bills and bags of mail back and forth. He was required to sit in the back of the chamber when the legislature was in session to run more errands, raise and lower the flag, pick up lunches, etc. He learned that he liked the legislative process as ideas were discussed and debated. As graduation neared, Bryan was intrigued by this other career field. He remarked, "I do joke that having a child development background doesn't hurt if you are going to work in politics 'because if you can talk to preschoolers, you can talk to legislators'." He graduated in 1990 and remains a proud MSU Spartan!

## FAMILY

Bryan's parents, Judy and the late Bill Harrison, believed in serving and leading in your community. Bill was a school board member and Judy was a county commissioner. They also served as youth

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group advisors, church elders and deacons, and coached youth sports teams. Bryan remembers that they were there at basically every event and competition he had growing up. Into his adult years, they were there consistently to help with house projects or helping with his kids. His parents were committed to “quantity time” in addition to “quality time”. These qualities of service and leadership are ones Bryan has passed down to his grown children. His son, Jake is a member of the Caledonia Township Fire Department and his daughter, Kaitlin works for the Nature Conservancy and has risen to a leadership position serving a cause she loves. Bryan raised his two children as a single parent after his divorce and is very proud of the independent adults they have become. He is thankful for many people that have supported him through the good and challenging times. Even though he had plans to remain single and focus on his children, he met an intelligent young lady in a work meeting one day. The attraction was mutual and now 18 years later, he shares a wonderful life with Rosalynn Bliss, whom he refers to as his soulmate.

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES:

- Blandford Nature Center Board of Directors
- Camp O'Malley Board of Directors
- Thornapple River Clean Up Volunteer
- Earthworks Harvest Gathering Volunteer
- Christmas in Caledonia Planning Committee
- Caledonia Independence Day Planning Committee
- Caledonia Harvest Festival Planning Committee
- Caledonia Parks and Trails Planning Committee
- Caledonia “Next Chapter” Library Committee
- Caledonia Chamber of Commerce – Board President
- Chairperson – Keep Caledonia Safe Committee
- Right Place Program Board of Directors

## CAREER

After college, Bryan began working for Caledonia Alum/Senate Majority Leader Dick Posthumus. In that role his responsibility was to support the people of West Michigan, resolving casework problems and researching legislation. He was then asked to go to work for Governor John Engler as a Director of Regulatory Reform, working to eliminate unnecessary regulations. When Governor Engler left office, Bryan was hired by Amway Corporation to manage their State Government Affairs Program which monitored pending legislation that could affect the company's products or business model.

In addition, beginning in the year 2000 to present, Bryan continues to serve as the Caledonia Township Supervisor. He has guided the community through times of rapid growth and recession. He has focused on the preservation of open space, creation of parkland, and establishment of walking trails. When Bryan first was elected, Caledonia had 60 acres of parkland – it now has over 600 acres. Bryan



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**Bryan at the Caledonia Trail Opening**

**The Caledonia Community  
Green Groundbreaking**



believes that working on the local level is where things actually get done! He explains, "My service as Caledonia Township Supervisor is the most rich and rewarding experience of my professional life. Our parks and paths, the library, and community events all are a proud legacy and contribution to try and keep Caledonia a great place to call home. I also take pride in working to secure funding for road improvements, staffing and training for the fire department, and the less exciting invisible foundations that support a strong community."

## **COMMUNITY**

Bryan was also instrumental in the vision for the township library. Working with a citizen-driven grassroots group, "The Next Chapter" team raised over \$1,000,000 towards the cost of the project. Meanwhile, the Township saved \$1,000,000 as its contribution to the cause. Township residents approved a dedicated millage for the remaining cost and the dream of a new library became a reality. Just in front of the library sat a number of vacant commercial lots that had gone undeveloped for over 25 years. The township persuaded the owners to sell the parcels with the vision of creating a park space immediately adjacent to the library. A MDNR grant of nearly \$1 million helped finance the purchase and in 2020 the community cut the ribbon on the 26-acre Caledonia Community Green Park. Amenities include an outdoor amphitheater, picnic and bathroom pavilion, a dog park, walking trails, and pickle ball courts. The splash pad just opened this summer also. The combination of park and library truly creates a center of community for Caledonia residents to gather and celebrate. He is proud to have played a part in these spaces that people can use and enjoy. "When I was 16 and at Caledonia Lakeside Park for a Cross Country meet, I happened to notice a plaque on a stone listing the names of the individuals who generations before had worked to preserve the property and make the park a reality. A light bulb went off with the realization that parks just don't happen—that someone has to work to secure the land, design the amenities and then be a caretaker. It seems obvious but I think many of us take for granted all the good things that add to our quality of life."

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There is an invisible army of good people behind every park, event or athletic organization – it's the people that make our community," Bryan recalls.

Other areas Bryan has been involved in is the transition of a full-time professional fire rescue department. In response to rapid growth and escalating calls for help, the community approved funding for 24 hour/7 day service and increased medical training for the first responders. He serves as the current President of the Caledonia Area Chamber of Commerce. The organization helps promote and connect locally owned business and hosts community events that highlight its members. Bryan is proud to be instrumental in improving the quality of life for the community residents and for generations to come. In 2014, he was also bestowed the honor of being named "West Michigan Father of the Year" by the American Diabetes Association. A nomination and title he does not take lightly. He remarks, "My kids are my everything. I hope to inspire other single dads, and married dads, to be good ones."

When Bryan is not working or volunteering, he tries to spend time outdoors. He enjoys kayaking on the Thornapple River, walking, biking, or doing yoga. He and Rosalynn like to cook healthy meals together. He spends time with family and friends at a number of music festivals that combine camping with a full weekend of bands. Bryan is also an avid reader and always has a stack of books he is working on.

Bryan recognizes what a gift it is to live in this community, "My kids were the 6th generation to call Caledonia home. That's amazing. Certainly growth has changed the way our community looks. There are more rooftops, traffic, and kids in the classroom. However, one thing that hasn't changed is that it is the people who make our community special. Whether you've been here 6 years or 6 generations – if you show up and try to make things better, I'm glad you chose to make Caledonia your home."

The Caledonia Education Foundation is thrilled to honor Bryan for his dedication and service to the Caledonia Community. His leadership will enable and equip the community to continue to improve and move forward.



## **BRYAN'S FAMILY**

**JAKE HARRISON, BRYAN  
HARRISON, ROSALYNN  
BLISS, KAITLIN HARRISON,  
TRAVIS RICHARDSON**

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## BRYAN'S WORDS OF WISDOM FOR CALEDONIA STUDENTS

Be a good person. Be kind. You never know what another person is going through so give them grace, love and the benefit of the doubt.

Read! There is a treasure of wisdom available in books and blogs.

Avoid debt and contain your lifestyle spending. Live simply and invest the rest. Financial freedom gives you freedom in many other ways.

Be careful what job you take because you will probably be good at it, get promoted, and then be "trapped" too high up the ladder if it wasn't truly the career for you.

You will become the people you surround yourself with – good or bad. Choose wisely.

