

SJPS Foundation Announces 2018 Distinguished Alumni

The St. Joseph Public School Foundation has selected Dr. Theresa Orlaske-Rich, Class of 1978, and Dr. Mary Jo Burkhard, Class of 1982, as recipients of the 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award. The honorees will be recognized at a special ceremony on June 3 and later that day at the annual high school commencement.

Theresa Orlaske- Rich – Class of 1978



Following her graduation from SJHS in 1978, Theresa Orlaske-Rich earned Bachelors, Masters and PhD degrees in business, a PhD in philosophy, and a Juris Doctor degree. In 2016, she retired from General Motors Corporation after a 32-year career in tax law and human resources, and is currently a principal of RichLaw, PLLC, in Farmington Hills, Michigan, practicing estate planning, elder law, real estate and business law. While at GM, Theresa worked in 12 countries on 5 continents, including developing human resource strategies, leading diversity initiatives and serving as an executive coach. She is a published author, motivational speaker, and has been an adjunct faculty member at Michigan State University and the Wayne State University Mike Ilitch School of Business. She also has provided consulting services for people making professional and personal transitions and, in that practice, authored the self-published book “Staying Sane in Crazy Times”

Her community work includes elective offices as President of the Oakland Schools Board of Education, an intermediate school district serving over 200,000 students in 28 school districts, and as a City Council member of Farmington Hills, Michigan, a city of 85,000 residents. She has also worked with the Farmington Hills Commission on Children, Youth & Families; Girls Scouts of South Eastern Michigan Advisory Council; the Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired; the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments; The Oakland Schools Education Foundation; and a Committee to Increase Voter Participation. Teresa and her husband, Brian, have two adult children, Zachary and Allison, and remain close to family in Berrien County. Her parents are Jerry and Carol Orlaske.

Mary Jo Burkhard – Class of 1982



Dr. Mary Jo Burkhard is the Associate Dean for Faculty & Staff Affairs, Inclusive Diversity and Planning at The Ohio State University. She received a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Pathologists, and has a PhD in philosophy. She is an accomplished scientist, researcher, author of 48 publications and 101 abstracts, posters, platform and case presentations. She has received over 6 million dollars of grant support for her research, focused on issues including feline immunodeficiency virus and HIV transmission and the diagnosis of lymphoid cancers. She is also a board-certified specialist in veterinary clinical pathology, with over 500 hours in classroom and laboratory instruction in clinical pathology and immunology. She has served as a program coordinator and has three

excellence in teaching awards. Her contributions to The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine include initiatives to nurture a supportive culture and community of inclusion. She leads a Diversity Council, involving the Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine and local and national diversity experts, as well as a committee of OSU faculty, staff and students to plan and facilitate events to promote diversity and inclusion. As a direct result, the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine received the 2017 Health Professions Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award. She has been active in the Career Transition Institute and Columbus American Marking Association and the Columbus Chapter of the International Coaching Federation. Rustin M. Moore, the Dean of the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, nominated Dr. Burkhard, stating:

“Currently, the veterinary profession is going through a transition where many older veterinarians are mostly white males, whereas current students and faculty are an increasingly diverse population of mostly young women. Thus, it is even more important to have established female role models within the profession to help future veterinary professionals feel capable and valued. Dr. Burkhard is an exemplary role model for everyone, regardless of their gender, race/ethnicity, background or other attributes.”

Dr. Burkhard is married to Ron Tiefenbach, SJHS Class of 1979. Her parents are Bob and Nancy Burkhard.

The St. Joseph Public Schools Foundation has annually honored distinguished SJHS alumni since 2012. These individuals have excelled in their professions and/or made significant contributions to their community. Distinguished Alumni achievements, strength of character and citizenship serve as a valuable model to inspire and challenge current students. Nominees are accepted in the following categories: Professional Achievement, Community Service and Volunteerism, with selection being based on the following criteria:

- Graduate of St. Joseph Public Schools for 10 or more years
- Demonstrates a high level of achievement in his/her field and has made significant contributions
- Exhibits inspirational leadership, character and service