



East Aurora Educational Foundation

Impact Report 2025

Our mission is to enhance the educational experience of students in the East Aurora Union Free School District. Since 1988, the East Aurora Educational Foundation has worked with teachers, administrators, and the East Aurora community to provide over \$1,200,000 in educational grants.



East Aurora Educational Foundation
430 Main Street
East Aurora, NY 14052



A Note from the East Aurora Educational Foundation

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude. Thanks to your unwavering belief in our mission, 2025 has become a record-breaking year for the East Aurora Educational Foundation.

We are thrilled to share that in 2025 we awarded the highest amount of grant funding in our foundation's history. This milestone isn't just about a number on a ledger; it represents a massive expansion of opportunity for our students. From cutting-edge technology and STEAM lab enhancements to innovative classroom projects that the district budget simply couldn't reach, these record breaking funds have allowed our teachers to dream bigger than ever before. Every dollar you contributed was directly translated into "lightbulb moments" across every grade level.

Thank you for making 2025 a year for the history books. We look forward to all that is to come.

With deepest gratitude,

The East Aurora Educational Foundation

Connect With Us

Looking for more details or want to get involved?

Visit our website: www.eastauroraef.org

Quick Scan: Use your phone camera on the QR code to jump straight to our homepage!



Board of Directors and Staff

President

Betsey Dechert-Boss

Vice President

Holly Freed

Secretary

Susan McClaren

Treasurer

Jill Ervin

Directors

Dan Brunson

Laurie Eden

Sarah Hornung

Andrea Kasperek

Jeffrey Markello

Kimberly McAtee

Andy Schultz

District Liason

Matthew Brown

EA Middle School Principal



Brittany Neumann

Development Director

As Development Director of the East Aurora Educational Foundation, Brittany Neumann brings a wealth of experience in event management and community-focused philanthropy to her role. A 2007 graduate of East Aurora High School, she returned to her alma mater in 2023 to lead the foundation's efforts to enhance student learning experiences.

Now a familiar face in the district, she leverages her background in the non-profit sector and local roots to support the foundation's mission of enhancing the educational experience of district students.



Cindy Bojak

Scholarship Administrator

As the Scholarship Administrator for the East Aurora Educational Foundation, Cindy Bojak plays a vital role in managing opportunities that support graduating seniors' future endeavors.

Bringing a dedicated and organized approach to the foundation, Cindy oversees the intricate process of scholarship distribution. As the key point of contact for both students and universities, she helps bridge the gap between high school achievement and the next chapter of a student's educational journey.

2025 Grants: \$146,337 awarded to Empower Excellence

Innovative Learning Through Robotics – Shaun Canaski – 1/7/25 – \$12,072

The East Aurora Middle School Tech program, led by Mr. Canaski, is stepping into the future of education by introducing VexIQ Robotics, giving students in grades 6–8 new hands-on experiences in STEM learning. This innovative program empowers students to build, code, and solve real-world challenges using cutting-edge robotics technology, fostering creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. By launching this initiative, Mr. Canaski is equipping students with the essential skills they need to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

Utilizing Technology for Innovation and Design Thinking – Amie Marcklinger, Gary Terhune – 2/4/25 – \$3,200

Students explore how technology can be applied during the design thinking process to help develop engaging experiences for authentic audiences. Specifically, students learn to code Ozobots, Makey Makey and Microbits, with the opportunity to expand into robotics with Hummingbird.

Rototiller – Ethan Hansen, Jeff Shelley – 2/4/25 – \$1,000

The Foundation accepted a thoughtful donation from East Aurora resident Thomas Hagner for the Sustainable Agriculture Program. This gift allowed the program to acquire a rototiller, crucial for soil preparation in both the high tunnels and traditional garden. Mr. Hagner's support was inspired by the impactful work of teachers Jeff Shelley and Ethan Hansen and his recognition of the program's role in fostering students understanding of sustainable environmental practices.



Band Piece Commission – Jeff Wilmore – 3/4/25 – \$15,000

Exciting news for the East Aurora Middle School music program! Our bands will be working alongside a world-renowned composer to premiere a brand new musical piece. Created exclusively for the East Aurora Middle School bands, this composition will be unveiled at their Spring 2026 band concert. The piece will draw inspiration from and celebrate the rich history and heritage of the Village of East Aurora.

Sustainable Agriculture Internship Program – Ethan Hansen, Jeff Shelley – 4/1/25 – \$4,500

The East Aurora Educational Foundation is investing in the future of sustainable agriculture education! This grant funded summer interns and advisors to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Sustainable Agriculture farm. This allowed the farm to run throughout the year, providing valuable learning experiences in sustainable agriculture for summer camps, including those from organizations like ROC.

CNC Machine – Austin Dodge – 5/6/25 – \$39,525

Our new CNC router project brings cutting-edge technology to high school classrooms, offering students hands-on experience in digital fabrication and advanced manufacturing. Through real-world projects like those in Blue Devil Design, students will develop valuable skills in engineering, design, and machining, preparing them for future careers. This initiative strengthens our commitment to STEM education and provides impactful learning opportunities.



Sustainable Agriculture Utilities – Ethan Hansen, Jeff Shelley – 6/3/25 – \$2,540

The East Aurora Educational Foundation is providing funding for materials and supplies to extend utility services to the farm lab at East Aurora High School. This will make daily tasks at the farm easier for students and faculty.

Grading for Equity – Brian Russ & Jessica Lyons – 10/7/25 – \$55,000

East Aurora is reimagining grading through a bold, equity-focused initiative designed to ensure every student's academic progress is accurately and fairly reported. With support from GradingRx, the district will be piloting a new report card system that separates academic achievement from behavioral skills. This innovative, research based reform is transforming grading practices to reflect student learning more clearly and equitably, empowering both educators and families.

EAMS Rapid Prototyping into the Future – Shaun Canaski – 12/2/25 – \$13,500

This project establishes a cutting-edge Digital Fabrication Lab for East Aurora Middle School by acquiring high-speed, multi-color 3D printers and precision laser engraving units. Students will move beyond basic models to master a complete, industry-standard workflow, creating complex hybrid projects that blend 3D-printed components with laser-cut materials. This investment directly prepares our students for high-demand careers by providing them with dynamic, hands-on experience in rapid prototyping and advanced manufacturing techniques.

East Aurora High School Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame

Honor a Legacy: Nominate a Distinguished Alumnus

Do you know a Blue Devil who has made a profound impact on the world? The East Aurora Educational Foundation, in partnership with the East Aurora School District, is seeking nominations for the Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame.

Each year, we recognize up to five graduates who embody excellence, whether through outstanding professional achievement, dedicated community service, or significant contributions to humanity. Honorees are celebrated with a commemorative plaque at the High School and invited to inspire current students as guests of honor at a special spring assembly.

Nomination Highlights:

- **Eligibility:** Nominees must have graduated at least 10 years ago. Posthumous nominations are welcome.
- **Selection:** Managed by the Foundation, the committee looks for excellence in a chosen field or service to the community on a local, regional, or national level.
- **Timeline:** Nominations are due by October 15 for consideration for the following year. Once submitted, nominations remain active indefinitely.

Help us celebrate the rich history of East Aurora High School by highlighting the leaders, innovators, and helpers among our alumni. Visit our website www.eastauroraef.org for more information and to download the nomination form.

2025 Inductees



Art Aungst '71 – A member of the legendary 1970 "Bombers" swim team, Art was honored for nearly 50 years of transformative service as a special education teacher, author, and championship coach. While his accolades include being named New York State Coach of the Year, his true legacy lies in the "family" he built for students and athletes who found a home in his classroom and at the pool. Even in retirement, Art continues to give back as a volunteer coach for East Aurora, proving that his dedication to shaping young lives remains "the best part of his day."



Ellen Kitson Bennet '75 – Following a 28-year career as a special education administrator, Ellen Kitson Bennett turned personal tragedy – the loss of her daughter, Katie, to anorexia – into a mission of hope and education for others. As the founder and director of KMB for Answers, Ellen has become a vital regional leader in eating disorder education. Under her leadership, the organization has awarded over \$10,000 in scholarships to mental health professionals and launched innovative programs like The Body Project, which empowers young women to confront unrealistic beauty standards.



Joe Lamond '79 – A visionary leader who turned a passion for percussion into a global career that has shaped the music industry. After getting his start playing drums at the East Aurora Boys and Girls Club and eventually recording the hit "867-5309" with Tommy Tutone, Joe transitioned from the stage to the executive suite, serving as the CEO of the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) from 2001 until his recent retirement. Under his leadership, NAMM grew into a global powerhouse representing 130 countries and successfully lobbied for national legislation to include music and arts as core educational subjects—securing billions in funding for students across the U.S.



Lt. Col. Frederico "Will" Mendizabal '01 – A highly decorated Marine Corps pilot, Will has spent nearly two decades in active service. After graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy, he flew combat missions in Afghanistan and served as an exchange pilot with the Australian Army. Currently the Commanding Officer of Headquarters Squadron in Iwakuni, Japan, he leads over 800 Marines and Sailors while fostering community resilience as a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu coach.



Sarah Markle '06 – A professional cellist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, Sarah has performed on the world's most prestigious stages, from Broadway's *The Phantom of the Opera* to *America's Got Talent*. After training at the Peabody Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music, she has shared her talent with the Buffalo Philharmonic and the Roycroft Chamber Music Festival. Beyond her musical achievements, Sarah is a creative entrepreneur and dedicated animal rights advocate through her business, Limerickery.

Bridging the Gap from Textbooks to Tomorrow



Interview with Middle School Tech Teacher, Shaun Canaski

How two East Aurora Educational Foundation grants are turning classroom theory into hands-on innovation for East Aurora students.

What grants has the East Aurora Educational Foundation (EAEF) funded for you?

In 2025, the EAEF generously funded two transformative project grants: a set of 20 Vex IQ robot kits (Spring 2025) and a suite of four Bambu H2D 3D printers (Winter 2025). Together, these grants have established a robust foundation for competitive robotics and advanced digital fabrication within the East Aurora Middle School that directly impacts every student grades 6-8.



What was the specific need or challenge in your classroom that this grant helped you solve?

The primary challenge was a lack of meaningful access to modern technology. In the past, robotics was non-existent at East Aurora Middle School, leaving a significant gap in our STEM pathway. Furthermore, our existing 3D printing capabilities had become a barrier rather than a tool; the printers were extremely slow and carried a high cost-per-print that inhibited a creative outlet. This grant solved two critical needs. First it allowed us to introduce the first-ever formal robotics program at EAMS. Also, by moving to Bambu 3D printers, we replaced an inefficient, costly system with high-speed, efficient, cost-effective technology, ensuring that every student can 3D model a design and print their ideas in a timely manner.

How does the support from EAEF allow you to go above and beyond the standard curriculum?

While the standard curriculum teaches students how technology works, the EAEF support allows them to actually put it to work. A perfect example of this was our participation in Tech Wars in the Spring of 2025. Because we had the Vex IQ kits, I was able to take a group of students to compete in the Robotics event. They weren't just following a manual; they were tasked with engineering an autonomous robot capable of racing through a specific course. This required advanced coding, logic, and mechanical troubleshooting—skills that far exceed traditional classroom requirements. In the classroom students are able to work in small groups and compete to solve real world problems using Vex IQ to scaffold their knowledge.



Beyond competition, these grants provide East Aurora Middle School students with a unique "head start." By experiencing high-speed 3D printing and robotics now, they are gaining the confidence and technical literacy needed to navigate high school programming and future STEM careers showing students they are capable of succeeding in high-demand, 21st-century fields.

Without this funding, how would you have approached this lesson or project?

Without this funding, the robotics program at East Aurora Middle School simply would not exist. We would have been forced to stick to a traditional, theory-based curriculum where students read about engineering on a Chromebook rather than experiencing it firsthand. Our participation in events like Tech Wars would have been impossible, and our students would have missed the chance to develop the autonomous coding skills that are now a highlight of their experience.

Regarding 3D printing, we would still be hindered by outdated equipment that was too slow for a standard class period and too expensive for me to print more than a small object for 1 grade level. We would have remained in a "bottleneck" where students' designs stayed on a digital screen because the physical production was too slow or cost-prohibitive. This grant didn't just provide equipment; it provided the permission for every student to design, build, and create in rapid prototyping.



The Annual Celebration Event and James Ford Commitment to Education Award

The Annual Celebration Event is the cornerstone of the East Aurora Educational Foundation's calendar. More than just our primary fundraiser, this evening serves as a heartfelt tribute to the teachers, administrators, and community partners who make our district extraordinary. It is a night dedicated to recognizing the businesses and individuals whose generosity fuels our mission, allowing us to invest in the future of every student in the East Aurora Union Free School District.

A highlight of the evening is the presentation of the **James Ford Commitment to Education Award**. Established in memory of one of the foundation's founding members, Dr. James Ford, this prestigious honor is reserved for an individual or organization that mirrors his legendary spirit.

Recipients are selected based on four core pillars:

- A deep commitment to bettering East Aurora schools.
- Persistent dedication to the educational cause.
- Creative and original thinking in problem-solving.
- Active involvement in the life of our community.

This is more than an award; it is a reflection of the spirit Dr. Ford brought to our schools—a way to honor those who have made the service of others and the success of our students their life's work.



A Legacy of Leadership Christina Schutrum Honored with 2025 James Ford Award

The East Aurora Educational Foundation was proud to name Christina Schutrum as the recipient of the 2025 James Ford Commitment to Education Award. A cornerstone of the district for over 25 years, Schutrum was described by former student Allie Geary ('13) as a "quiet hero"—a sentiment echoed throughout the community she served with tireless dedication.

During her tenure as a physical education teacher at EAHS, Schutrum was a pioneer of experiential learning. She transformed the traditional gym credit into a journey of self-discovery, introducing students to kayaking, snowshoeing, and archery. Her influence extended far beyond the classroom through the Adventure Club, where she led annual ski trips and hikes, and the Bagel Club, a monthly gathering she created to provide students with a safe, comfortable space to discuss life and find mentorship.

On the athletic fields, Schutrum's impact as the girls' varsity lacrosse coach was equally profound. While she built competitive teams, her true focus remained on character. By integrating service projects like the "Donate Life" game into her program, she taught her athletes that leadership was rooted in giving back.

Even following her retirement, Schutrum remains a vital force in East Aurora. Whether she is supporting the Boys and Girls Club alongside her husband, CEO Gary Schutrum, or mentoring the next generation of coaches, her legacy of "thinking outside the box" continues to shape the district. The James Ford Award served as a fitting tribute to a career defined by innovation, heart, and an unwavering commitment to the success of East Aurora students.

Nominate an Exceptional Educator for the James Ford Commitment to Education Award

Do you know an East Aurora educator who goes above and beyond? Now is the time to honor their dedication! We are currently accepting nominations for the James Ford Commitment to Education Award. To be considered for the 2026 selection, please submit your nomination by May 22, 2026.

The honoree will be celebrated at our 14th Annual Celebration this fall. Visit our website to be inspired by the stories of our previous recipients and download a nomination form today.

Learn More: www.eastauroraef.org
Scan the QR code to visit our site.



A Special Thank You to Our 13th Annual Celebration Event Partners

Presenting Sponsor



Platinum Sponsor

SCOTT KLEIN
GATES GANDOLFO
WEALTH MANAGEMENT OF
RAYMOND JAMES

Table Sponsors

The Annex
clevermethod
East Aurora Advertiser
Moog
Pioneer Motorsport
Webster Szanyi, LLP

Gold Sponsors

Michael and Susan McClaren
Brian and Patty Russ
Buffalo Construction Consultants
Culov Wealth Management
Curbell Plastics
Delaware North
East Aurora Police Quaker Club
Grove Roofing Services, Inc.
Mader Construction Company
Metzger, Inc
On Track Construction
Sakowski & Markello, LLP
Shaw & Shaw, P.C.

Silver Sponsors

Ken Boss and Betsey Dechert-Boss
The Danieu Family
Diane Schultz
Bar Bill Tavern
Fox Run at Orchard Park
Laub International, Inc.
Parkview Health Services
Pizza Del Aureos
West Herr Auto Group

Bronze Sponsors

Donna Border
Matt and Christy Brown
Mark and Cathleen Dechert
Jim and Karen Dusel
Laurie Eden
Peg Fletcher
Tim and Holly Freed
James Hoagland & Deborah Carr-Hoagland
Matt and Kat Librock
The Mambretti Family
Peter and Suzanne Mercurio
T'Hani Pantoja
Bill and Michelle Roberts
Andy & Courtney Schultz

Bronze Sponsors

Andrews Barber Parlor LLC
Bond, Schoeneck & King PLLC
East Aurora Faculty Association
East Aurora Family Dentistry
Flaherty Real Estate Services
Great Erie Federal Credit Union
The Browne Company
MedBill Management
Loptr LLC
Seneca Animal Hospital
Vidler's 5 & 10 Inc.
Vision Development of WNY
Wellsville Carpet Town Inc. DBA
Ashley Furniture Homestore
Young & Wright Architectural

Celebration Committee Members

Kim Crowley-Browne
Betsey Dechert-Boss
Laurie Eden
Holly Freed
Sarah Hornung
Andrea Kasperek
Mia Markello
Kimberly McAtee
Susan McClaren
Kate Ruh
Courtney Schultz
Diane Schultz

Silent Auction Donors

42 North Brewing Company
Aurora Players
Blue Devil Design
Blue Eyed Baker
Blueberry Treehouse Farm
Borderland Music Festival
Buffalo Bandits
Buffalo Bills Foundation
Buffalo Sabres
Cassandra's Kitchen
The Copper Shop Gallery
Courtney Schultz
Crag Burn Golf Club
Crossbar Athletics
DECA Devils Den
Dina Colucci
East Aurora Cooperative Market
EAEF Board
EAHS Sustainable Agriculture Program
eight x eight
ERLO
Farmcraft Brewery
Four Honey Bees Cottage
Greater East Aurora
Chamber of Commerce
Jeffrey and Mia Markello
Judson and Colleen Aungst
Kate Ruh
Lilies of the Field
Meibohm Fine Arts
Park Edge Sweet Shoppe
Peg's Hardware
Rosie's Handcrafted Ice Cream
Reed's Wines & Liquors
Sammy's Car Wash
Sonwill Distribution, LLC.
Three Chord Bourbon
Toy Loft
Tracy Gavin
Village Play





Thank you to our 2025 Donors

Jessica Armbrust
 The Armstrong Family
 The Assad Family
 Arthur and Babette Aungst
 Judson and Colleen Aungst
 Beauty Organix
 Jim and Becky Biddle
 Ken and Cindy Bojak
 Lisa Boldt
 Monique Brannon
 Daniel and Margaret Brunson
 Jeffrey and Jennifer Burke
 Bradley Buyers
 Lesley Carlson
 Sue Chudy and Kathy Holmes
 Jim and Judi Coder
 John Conroy and Nancy Aungst
 Tobias and Autumn Corcoran
 Rhonda Cornum
 Michael Croft and Susan Duffy
 John and Kimberlee Danieul
 Allan and Karen Dechert
 Mark and Cathleen Dechert
 Peter and Heather Dechert
 Jim and Karen Dusel
 East Aurora Cooperative Market
 Laurie Eden
 Jeff and Tracy Ensminger
 Mike and Jill Ervin
 Dan and Leayn Flaherty
 Peg Fletcher

Jim and Deb Ford
 Timothy and Holly Freed
 Mike and Amy Gates
 Amy Girard
 Thomas Hagner
 Donald Hayes
 Lois Hensel
 James Hoagland and Deborah Carr Hoagland
 Ben Holmes
 Kristen Holtz
 Patrick and Sarah Hornung
 Darryl and Ashley Howe
 Alison Hyde
 John and Maria Improta
 Joan Jacobus
 Doug and Andrea Kasperek
 Mary Kelkenberg
 Mary Ann Keller King
 Kathleen Kirk
 Stan and Sherrill Kujawski
 Frank and Mary Kay LaForce
 Joe and Alyson Lamond
 Jeffrey and Dawn Lewis
 Matthew and Kat Librock
 Ehsan and Amber Malek
 Mark and Meghan Mambretti
 Jeff and Mia Markello
 Nancy Markello
 Michael and Susan McClaren
 Michael and Jacqueline McClure
 Jim and Cyndi McDonald

Myrna McNaboe
 Peter and Suzanne Mercurio
 Dan Missert and Sally Logan
 Frank and Lynn Nigro
 Martin Nowak
 Dick and Debbie O'Connor
 Shawn and Brynn Patterson
 Michael and Karla Prychodko
 Dale and JoAnn Reeves
 Thomas and Jean Ricci
 Joanne Ridgway
 Bill and Michelle Roberts
 Brad and Anne Rogers
 Matthew Romagnuolo
 Thomas and Nora Ruhland
 Brian and Patty Russ
 Andy and Courtney Schultz
 Diane Schultz
 Gary and Christina Schutrum
 JR Seeger
 Robert and Heather Shanahan
 Ned and Nora Snyder
 Ted Spooner
 Matthew and Patricia Szymanski
 The Keller Family
 Ralph and Laura Vanner
 Don and Maris Vidler
 Jessica Weitzel
 Jennifer Wiech
 Karen Wielinski
 Bill and Candace Wlodarczyk

Tribute Gifts

Gretchen Brough *in memory of Vincent Brough*
 Jim and Deb Ford *in memory of Doris Bush*
 Thomas Hagner *in honor of Ananya Barrera*
 Daniel and Janice Horschel *in memory of Vincent Brough*
 George Janofsky *in memory of Violette Janofsky*
 Mary Ann Keller King *in memory of Edward and Marie Keller*
 Marty and Mim Link *in memory of David Schultz*
 Walt and Patty Lyons *in honor of David Walleshauser*
 Jeff and Mia Markello *in honor of Dan Brunson*
 Michaelene McFarlane *in honor of Mia and Jeff Markello*
 Nancy Murphy *in memory of Mary Murphy*
 Marybeth Shaw *in memory of Lou Rozanski*
 Marybeth Shaw *in memory of Violette Janofsky*
 JoAnn Wahl *in honor of grandsons, Anthony & Sawyer Czekanski*

Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame Committee Members

Betsey Dechert-Boss
 Laurie Eden
 Rob Goller
 Jay Hoagland
 Andrea Kasperek
 Mary Ann Keller King
 Jeff Markello
 Susan McBurney
 Rick Ohler
 Andy Schultz
 Don Vidler



www.eastauroraef.org

Support the Future of East Aurora Education

Your support directly fuels innovation in our classrooms and creates lasting opportunities for our students. Whether you are looking to get involved as a volunteer, attend an event, make an immediate impact through a one-time or recurring gift, or leave a legacy through planned giving, there are many ways to make a difference. We invite you to explore how your generosity can shape generations by visiting the "Get Involved" or "Donate" sections of our website at www.eastauroraef.org or by scanning the QR code.

Together, we can ensure a bright future for our schools and our community.