

For Immediate Release

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Educators' Legacy Lives on with \$2.2 Million Estate Gift to Benefit Fennville Public Schools and Students

A generous planned gift from the estate of longtime educators James and Grace Walz will benefit Fennville Public Schools' students and educators for generations to come. James and Grace dedicated decades to Fennville Public Schools. Grace taught U.S. History, World History, Michigan History, and Government for 28 years, while James served as the high school librarian for 23 years, both retiring in 1986. Their lifelong commitment to education and service will live on through funds established with the Allegan County Community Foundation (ACCF).

Grace brought history to life through hands-on learning, organizing activities such as tombstone tracings in local cemeteries and immersive Thanksgiving history lessons. She was an incessant, voracious reader, and her love of learning shaped countless students and inspired future educators. A former student recalled visiting Mrs. Walz after college, *"She was my world history teacher, the most knowledgeable person I have ever known. She knew everything. I wondered how she could be so bright. When I walked into her house, I finally figured it out. Every single wall was a bookshelf from floor to ceiling, even in the bathroom. Mrs. Walz has shaped my teaching philosophy not*

only in world history, but in economics and world religions. Thank you, Mrs. Walz."

James taught many students about problem-solving, professionalism, and how to serve the public with courtesy and respect. Upon his retirement, a community member shared *"For twelve years I have had nothing but praise for the library you have kept. We are all proud of it and grateful to you."* He was always ready to help students and teachers find the resources they needed to learn, imagine, and create.

Though James and Grace had no children of their own, their dream had always been to help students from Fennville Public Schools follow their educational and personal goals, continuing the tradition of quiet generosity that has already supported so many. With guidance from their long-time and trusted financial advisor, Joe Johnson of Delong & Brower, Grace worked with the Allegan County Community Foundation to structure a planned gift to continue that legacy, supporting students, teachers, and learning initiatives in Fennville.

The funds will provide flexible support for Fennville Public Schools. This includes resources to support Fennville High School graduating seniors in pursuing college or skilled trades, as well as resources for teachers to develop creative classroom projects and purchase learning materials. Designed to last indefinitely, the funds will ensure their generosity continues to empower students and inspire educators in the community for generations.

"We are deeply honored to steward the legacy of James and Grace Walz." said Stephanie Calhoun, President/CEO of the Allegan County Community Foundation. *"Their gift is an extraordinary example of how thoughtful and deliberate planning can make a lasting impact in a community."*

Beyond its own impact, the gift reflects Grace's hope that students who benefit will be inspired to give back to Fennville Public Schools, continuing a cycle of learning and generosity for generations. If you are interested in learning more about planned giving, contact ACCF to explore options that reflect your values and goals.

About the Allegan County Community Foundation

Celebrating 60 years of service in 2025, the Allegan County Community Foundation (ACCF) has been connecting donors with community needs since its founding in 1965. With a mission to positively impact Allegan County through financial stewardship, education, and community partnerships, ACCF builds and grows permanent funds that support housing, youth, education, food security, nonprofit sustainability, and so much more. What began with the foresight of civic-minded residents and the first endowed gift from Ethol Stone in 1969 has grown into a lasting legacy of impact, ensuring Allegan County thrives today and for generations to come