

## A volunteer spotlight on: Richard Polk



We have amazing volunteers within our Foundation community. We recently interviewed Richard Polk about his connection to the Foundation and what being part of our community means to him.

### How did you first become connected with the Foundation?

My introduction to the Foundation was in 1994. My late father-in-law, Jack Klain, became very active in the early days of the Foundation when it was known as the Epileptic Clinic, as his daughter, Cynthia, was diagnosed with epilepsy at a young age. As an accountant, he provided accounting services for many years as well as serving as President of the Board in the late 1980s. He asked that I contact Arlene Gorelick, who was the Executive Director of the Foundation at the time, about assisting in planned giving efforts. I am an attorney with a focus on estate planning and I knew Arlene, so that is how I got started and never looked back.

### What is your main role with the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan?

I have had many roles with the Foundation and, basically, offered to help in any way when asked. I joined the Board in October 1996. I moved up the ladder and became Chair in 2012, acting as Chair for 2 years. In addition, I have served on the Investment Committee, Finance Committee and Nominating Committees, as well as acting as a speaker at various fundraising and other events over the years, including the Flame of Hope, Toasting Hope, Wellness Conference, legislative day in Lansing, Celebrating Abilities, Arlene's retirement, and Summer Stroll, among others. I have frequently been asked to review legal and other matters as they came up from time to time. Among other activities, I have also participated in the Summer Stroll for many years, attended the Toasting Hope, raised funds for the Stroll and obtained donation items for Toasting Hope, and attended VIP days at Camp Discovery.

### How long have you volunteered with the Foundation?

Through my final Board meeting in October, it has been 26+ years so far.

### Tell us one of your most memorable moments in your role.

The Flame of Hope was an annual event that recognized individuals for their efforts on behalf of epilepsy, and I was asked for several years to be the emcee for such event. I made certain I met the honorees before speaking so I could learn something about them. The first honoree I met was Kellie Jankowski who was establishing a fund in memory of her daughter, Dakota Pequeno, who died from SUDEP at the age of 16. It was very emotional for me and, to this day, Kellie and I have a special relationship that I will never forget.

### What would you tell others to encourage them to volunteer?

If you know people who are open to charitable activities and have time to give, invite them to an Open House. It would be difficult to not feel immediately the Foundation's spirit, dedication and enthusiasm exhibited by those you would meet, whether they be staff, Board members, volunteers or families with connections to epilepsy. I would also encourage anyone to view the Foundation's wonderful and informative website.

### What does the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan mean to you?

It is impossible to put into words. I think of a beautiful June morning at the Detroit Zoo attending the Summer Stroll. I watch several thousand people, a United Nations of diversity, many with epilepsy at various levels of involvement with their families, staff, Board members and volunteers, teams with creative shirts and costumes, enjoying themselves, celebrating their relationship with the Foundation and what it means to each and every one of them. As I observe, the feeling is unbelievable, and I realize how fortunate I am to have had the opportunity to be a member of the Foundation family and a small part of what an amazing organization the Foundation has become. 🌟

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2021

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