



**Elly Bainbridge, Complete Your Degree
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What is your education/career background?

I spent 35 years working in higher education and recently retired from Grand Rapids Community College. Although I had many different titles during my time at GRCC, my work was always rooted in marketing and promoting the college's workforce development programs. Some of my favorite work involved getting to know adult students, hearing their stories, and sharing their journeys as they worked toward new skills, careers, and opportunities.

Those relationships were easily one of the most rewarding parts of my career. I met students from all walks of life, each with their own reasons for going back to school and their own challenges along the way. Getting to know them gave me a real appreciation for the courage and persistence it can take to make a change and pursue a new goal.

What are you looking forward to at the foundation?

I'm excited to continue working with students, but in a much more personal and hands-on way. I love getting to know people, learning about their goals, and helping them find opportunities and resources that can move them forward. I'm especially passionate about working with adults who may not see themselves as traditional college students but are ready to take that next step, whether that means returning to school, learning new skills, or changing careers.

I'm also really looking forward to building stronger connections with our local schools, colleges, employers, and community partners. There are so many opportunities available, and I want to help make sure people in Oceana County know about them and feel supported in taking advantage of them.

What do you love about Oceana County?

For me, it starts with Lake Michigan. I'm a beach bum through and through, and there's nowhere I'd rather be on a beautiful summer day. I love the beauty of this area and everything that comes with living so close to the lake. But honestly, I love our winters too. When summer winds down, the visitors head home, and things get a little quieter, there's a peacefulness here that I really appreciate. I love the rhythm of the seasons and getting to enjoy Oceana County in completely different ways throughout the year.

What might others not know about you?

People are sometimes surprised to learn that, despite seeming like a total extrovert, I really love spending time alone. I enjoy being around people and can talk to just about anyone, but I also truly appreciate my quiet time. I'm also a brand-new **Bubbe**! My new grandbaby lives nearby in Scottville, so I'm very lucky to have lots of opportunities for Bubbe time. And I'm a big foodie. I love great food, trying new restaurants, and discovering new favorites. I must admit, one of the things I miss most about Grand Rapids is the food scene!