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Will you consider a gift to help us continue in our fight against cancer and other diseases that affect more of our loved ones every day?

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☐ I would like more information about including Van Andel Institute in my estate plans.

\*Please make checks payable to Van Andel Institute.



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# MAKING PROGRESS AGAINST PARKINSON'S

200 Years After the First Medical Description of the Disease, Hope for a Cure Grows



DR. PATRIK BRUNDIN.

In 1817, an English surgeon named James Parkinson published *An Essay on the Shaking Palsy*, the first medical description of a disease that would later come to bear his name.

Since then, the tireless work of scientists, physicians, advocates and people with Parkinson's have revolutionized what we know about Parkinson's, opening new avenues for a major change in how it is diagnosed and treated.

For one, Parkinson's likely isn't a single uniform disease but rather a constellation of related conditions held together by common threads such as progressive loss of movement brought on by damage to dopamine-producing cells in the brain.

We also now know that it starts decades before the most notable symptoms appear, often with innocuous signs like trouble sleeping and a loss of a person's ability

to sense odors. This early phase—called prodromal Parkinson's disease—is of great interest to scientists, because it offers an incredible opportunity to potentially head off disease onset.

But here's the challenge: currently, there is no cure for Parkinson's and available treatments only help manage symptoms, not slow or stop its progress. There is hope, however, and it may come from somewhere that appears suprising at first glance.

On the surface, Parkinson's and diabetes don't appear to have much in common. But a deeper look reveals important overlaps that indicate some diabetes drugs could also disrupt the course of Parkinson's, which one day may give people more years with fewer symptoms. Called drug repurposing, this approach has the potential to save precious time and resources, getting much-needed therapies to patients faster.

"In my 35 years studying Parkinson's, I've never been more excited and more optimistic about a new drug therapy than I am now," said Dr. Patrik Brundin, director of Van Andel Research Institute's (VARI) Center for Neurodegenerative Science and chair of the Linked Clinical Trials committee, a joint effort between VARI and UK-based The Cure Parkinson's Trust. "Repurposing offers not just hope but a realistic shot that we will find a treatment that moves us closer to slowing disease progression."

As part of the Linked Clinical Trials initiative, several approved diabetes drugs, such as exenatide and liraglutide, are undergoing clinical testing to see if they can slow disease progress. Others, such as a compound called MSDC-0160, are not yet on the market but have demonstrated promising results in Brundin's laboratory. Scientists also are making headway on

more definitive ways to diagnose the disease, such as a simple blood test or brain scan. If all of these pieces come together, they could give physicians a powerful set of tools to delay the onset of symptoms and improve the lives of millions of people with the disease worldwide.

**"In my 35 years studying Parkinson's, I've never been more excited and more optimistic about a new drug therapy than I am now."**  
- Dr. Patrik Brundin

"In a perfect world, we would catch and treat the disease with drugs that slow or stop progression years, if not decades, earlier than we can even detect it now," Brundin said. "We're not there yet, but we're making crucial steps in that direction. Positive change is coming."

*All treatment decisions should be made in close consultation with a physician. It is critical that potential therapies, even those that are approved to treat other conditions, are thoroughly vetted for safety and effect in people with Parkinson's before use in the clinic. For more information on these trials and others supported by VARI, please visit [vai.org/clinical-trials](http://vai.org/clinical-trials).*

### Drug Repurposing

Using a drug that was developed or approved to treat one disease as a treatment for another.

# COMING TOGETHER TO FIGHT CANCER

When it comes to combating cancer, collaboration is one of the most powerful tools in our arsenal. That's why we teamed up with Stand Up To Cancer, the American Association for Cancer Research and other leading organizations, scientists and physicians two years ago to form the Van Andel Research Institute-Stand Up To Cancer (VARI-SU2C) Epigenetics Dream Team—to see what we can do when our collective expertise and resources are combined.

The results to date are four clinical trials at sites across the country and abroad, all aimed at fighting a variety of cancers, including:



MEMBERS OF THE VARI-SU2C EPIGENETICS DREAM TEAM.

- 1

**Metastatic colorectal cancer,** the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the U.S.
- 2

**Acute myeloid leukemia (AML),** an aggressive blood cancer that is notoriously difficult to treat and has poor long-term survival.
- 3

**Myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) and chronic myelomonocytic leukemia (CMML),** two blood cancers that are incurable with current drugs and that may progress to AML, a much more aggressive cancer.
- 4

**MDS and AML,** which also are the subject of a small pilot study that is investigating whether a simple tweak to the standard care regimen may improve the current therapy's ability to impede cancer cell growth and destroy cancer cells.

These trials are a critical step on the road from the laboratory to the clinic; they ensure the treatments being tested are safe and effective. If successful, the drug combinations being studied could help improve the lives of people suffering from these devastating diseases.

Learn more at [vai.org/clinical-trials](http://vai.org/clinical-trials).

It is with a heavy heart that we mourn the loss of Tom Isaacs, co-founder of The Cure Parkinson's Trust, a passionate advocate for the Parkinson's community and friend of the Institute; who passed away in May. Following his diagnosis more than 20 years ago, Tom made it his mission to find a cure for Parkinson's

by supporting innovative research, engaging the patient community and bringing scientists, physicians and advocates together in paradigm-shifting collaborations. He was a force of nature whose vibrant personality and dedicated efforts have had and will continue to have a major impact on the pursuit for a cure.



TOM HOLDING THE OLYMPIC TORCH. COURTESY OF THE CURE PARKINSON'S TRUST.



PUTTING AN END TO PARKINSON'S

Ken and Jill Peirce never thought they would be up at the crack of dawn, walking in a five-kilometer-long race, but on a rainy, frosty spring morning they were walking alongside hundreds of other people at the Purple Community 5K. Ken, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2013, didn't mind the cold, rain or the early morning, because he was walking in support of a cause that is close to his heart—Parkinson's disease research.

**One fateful meeting**  
In 2014, Ken and Jill made an appointment to meet with Dr. Patrik Brundin, Van Andel Research Institute's associate director of research and director of the Institute's

Center for Neurodegenerative Science. It was a meeting that gave them hope for the future and welcomed them into a supportive new community.

"We were really impressed with Patrik," Ken said. "He's got all the credentials in the world, but the way he speaks about Parkinson's research is so forthright, down to earth and easy to understand."

After their meeting, Dr. Brundin invited Ken and Jill to attend the Grand Challenges in Parkinson's Disease symposium, where they could listen to scientists from all over the world and learn about important advancements in Parkinson's disease research.

"The caliber of people who attend Grand Challenges is really impressive," Ken said. "It was very insightful and encouraging to hear from experts in Parkinson's disease research, and we really enjoyed being able to ask them questions about new discoveries on the horizon."

The Peirce's are proud to support the work of Dr. Brundin and the biomedical research taking place in their own backyard. "We are really blessed to have Dr. Brundin and his team here in West Michigan," Ken said. "We are really grateful to the Van Andel family for creating such a thriving scientific community in our hometown."

"It should make people feel good to know that when they become part of Purple Community and donate to the Institute, every penny goes into the lab—and for someone with Parkinson's that fact means the world to me."

- Ken Peirce

**Surprises are always welcome**  
When Ken and Jill signed up to walk the Purple Community 5K to support Dr. Brundin and Parkinson's disease research at the Institute, they thought they might raise \$500. After all was said and done, between donations from friends and family, they had raised almost \$4,000.

"When we saw that we raised so much money it was surprising," Jill said. "Once we told our story on Facebook and let people know 100 percent of the donations were going to Parkinson's research, it just took off."

It was heartening to learn that so many



(LEFT TO RIGHT) CAROL VAN ANDEL, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BRIAN CALLEY AND SHELLEY IRWIN.

people shared their desire to put an end to Parkinson's, and Ken thinks if the support for research remains strong, putting an end to Parkinson's is a real possibility.

"I'm an impatient person, and I want to see this horrible disease cured in my lifetime if

possible," Ken said. "It should make people feel good to know that when they become part of Purple Community and donate to the Institute, every penny goes into the lab—and for someone with Parkinson's that fact means the world to me."



(LEFT) THE PEIRCE FAMILY WITH THEIR GRANDCHILDREN. (RIGHT) LYNNE JARMAN-JOHNSON OF CONSUMERS CREDIT UNION.



COUNTRY KICKS CANCER—B93 AND THE INTERSECTION

**Most people might not pair biomedical research with country music, but for Van Andel Institute's (VAI) Purple Community it's a partnership made in heaven.** What started as a one-time concert event in 2011 has transformed into a year-round Country Kicks Cancer concert series with iHeartMedia's B93 radio station and local concert venue The Intersection.

For every Country Kicks Cancer ticket sold, The Intersection donates \$1 to fund cancer research at VAI. One dollar may not seem like a lot at first, but when you add it all up, every dollar makes a difference. For the 2016–2017 concert series, B93 brought in country artists like Hunter Hayes, Chase Rice, LoCash and Old Dominion to help raise over \$20,000—and it's not over yet.

Concerts are scheduled throughout the coming months and will continue until next year's Birthday Bash!

Over the years, B93 and The Intersection's commitment to supporting Purple Community and VAI has been truly remarkable. We're extremely grateful for their partnership and look forward to their continued support of cancer research—one country concert at a time.

Thank you B93 and The Intersection!



HUNTER HAYES.



HOCKEY FIGHTS CANCER

**Jenn Schweigert, mother of three hockey-obsessed sons, isn't afraid to take on big challenges.** In 2016, Schweigert organized the second annual Hockey Fights Cancer event at Southside Ice Arena in Byron Center, Michigan. The weekend-long event, featuring 24 youth hockey teams, raised more than \$75,000 to benefit cancer research at Van Andel Institute (VAI). It was an event that not only raised significant funds but united the West Michigan hockey community in the fight against cancer.

**Understanding the importance of research**  
Schweigert's father was diagnosed with brain cancer when she was still in college, and the news completely upended her life. "When I got the news that my dad had brain cancer, I thought I would have to leave school to be there for my family," Schweigert said. "I felt so helpless in that moment, because in reality there was very little I could do to help."

Thanks to advances in brain surgery and a new technique called brain mapping, Schweigert's father had an invasive but ultimately successful operation to remove a cancerous tumor on his brain. The experience gave Schweigert a deeper understanding of the importance of biomedical research and the need to support advancements in cancer therapy.

"I love that we have created an event that empowers young people and shows them that they can use what they love and what they are good at to give back."  
- Jenn Schweigert

"There is no doubt that this incredible discovery and this new technology allowed my dad to live, and because of this surgery he was there for my wedding and when my sons were born," Schweigert said. "After that, I just felt very strongly about supporting cancer research."

**Giving back—loving hockey**  
It wasn't long before Schweigert connected her family's love of hockey to her desire to give back and support the very research that saved her dad's life. She also wanted her sons to understand that they could use their passion for hockey to make a difference in people's lives.

"I love that we have created an event that empowers young people and shows them that they can use what they love and what they are good at to give back," Schweigert said. "I wanted my sons to know that even though we're not scientists and can't fight cancer on our own, we can throw a



DREW AGNEW WITH HIS  
TEACHER MICHELLE DECKER.

really good party and get people to come together to make a difference."

The party Schweigert organized with help from Purple Community, the Mike Knubel Family Foundation and the Fox Motors Youth Hockey Association has raised tens of thousands of dollars for research at VAI and has served to connect a community of families affected by cancer to a powerful and poignant movement. During the Hockey Fights Cancer weekend, players donned custom jerseys with the name of a friend or family member who has been affected by cancer stitched on the back. The gesture honored the lives of those who had lost their fight to cancer and paid tribute to those who continue to fight on.

"I recently received an email from a hockey player who skated in honor of a woman with cancer who dropped the puck at last year's event," Schweigert said. "The email said that the woman had passed away but that the event meant so much to her family, and it gave them such a special memory of their time together. These are the kinds of stories that encourage me to keep going."



(STARTING IN THE BACK, LEFT TO RIGHT)  
TRAVIS RICHARDS, MIKE KNUBLE, TODD SCHWEIGERT, SHERRY BOWEN, MIKE SLOBODNIK,  
DAVID LEFERE, DAVID VAN ANDEL; CAROL VAN ANDEL, ANGIE RICHARDS, MEGAN KNUBLE,  
JENN SCHWEIGERT, DAN BOWEN, MEREDITH SLOBODNIK AND CAREY LEFERE.

NO BARRIERS TO PURPLE POWER

**Diane Colvin finds it hard to hold back the tears during the days that lead up to Purple Power—a series of events that benefit cancer research at Van Andel Institute.** Colvin helps organize the series of student-focused sport events with the West Ottawa, Michigan, school district, where she has been a special education teacher for more than 18 years. Purple Power is a significant undertaking for everyone in the school district, and for Colvin, her participation is personal.

"When my mom had cancer, I knew I couldn't do much about it, and I felt powerless because I couldn't take it away from her," Colvin said. "But I knew two things I could do—pray and raise money to support cancer research."

Colvin's desire to support cancer research is shared by everyone on the Purple Power

committee, and for more than five years they have hosted events that connect the enthusiasm for student sports to powerful community action. Purple Power continues to gain momentum with each passing year, and last year alone the event raised more than \$30,000 to support cancer research.

"I wish cancer didn't touch so many people, but it's really great to see all the support we have to make these events happen," Colvin said. "Everyone on the committee works full time, and we are busy people, but this is something that we are all consumed by, and we know it's worth it."

**An open, inclusive community**  
Colvin has heard many cancer stories while organizing Purple Power, and with each story comes the understanding that cancer touches everyone.



LEEANNE ARCHER AND A  
WEST OTTAWA ATHLETE.

"It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, young or old, cancer can come into your life," Colvin said. "This past year I wore a jersey with the number 12 on it, because 12 people in my family have been affected by cancer."

Purple Power began with basketball games and has since grown to include hockey, soccer, swim and dive, wrestling and cheerleading. Students and families who attend the events wear purple clothing and custom jerseys in support of people who have been affected by cancer, and the events foster a feeling of shared support that reaches far outside the confines of West Michigan.

"Cancer isn't just focused on one community, so for our events there are no barriers," Colvin said. "Purple Power is an open, inclusive way for people who have been affected by cancer to take action, support cancer research and make a difference."

*Thank you to Diane Colvin and the Purple Power Committee, LeeAnne Archer, Sandi Brown, Mary Ringquist and Scott Wolterink for your generosity and hard work.*



(STARTING IN THE BACK, LEFT TO RIGHT) MARY RINGQUIST AND LEEANNE ARCHER; SANDI BROWN,  
DIANE COLVIN AND SCOTT WOLTERINK. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAURA VELDHOFF.





(TOP, DOWN, LEFT TO RIGHT) DAVID VAN ANDEL SPEAKING AT WINTERFEST; GEORGE SHARPE JR.; ALISON SHELTRON; JEFF BATTERSHALL AND RICHARD ROARE.



(TOP, DOWN, LEFT TO RIGHT) A MODEL AT ART OF FASHION AND RESEARCH; KEN DEWEY, CAROL VAN ANDEL AND RENNE JANOVSKY; DEB CLARKE AND PATRICK PLANK; DR. ELIZABETH KOWAL AND MARANDA; CAROL VAN ANDEL SPEAKING AT A CONVERSATION ABOUT DEPRESSION.





(TOP, DOWN, LEFT TO RIGHT) JBOARD CO-CHAIR CHAD BASSETT;  
GUESTS AT AROUND THE WORLD; DJ AB (ADRIAN BUTLER).

# THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS EVENT SPONSORS

To learn more about sponsoring an event contact Sarah Rollman at [Sarah.Rollman@vai.org](mailto:Sarah.Rollman@vai.org).

## Winterfest

B.D.'s BBQ  
Barnes & Thornburg, LLP  
Chemical Bank  
Cumulus  
Custer  
Cygnus 27  
Divani  
Eastbrook Homes  
John & Melynda Folkert  
Grand Rapids Christian Schools  
Gravity Taphouse Grille  
Harvey Automotive  
Honigman  
Melissa & Ralph Iannelli  
Iron  
Keeler  
Lighthouse Insurance Group Inc.  
Macatawa Bank  
McShane & Bowie, PLC  
Mercy Health  
Michigan State University - College of Human Medicine  
Mika Meyers, PLC  
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Pioneer Construction  
Pitsch Companies  
Preusser Jewelers  
Reds at Thousand Oaks  
Sanchez Bistro  
six.one.six  
Sobie Meats  
Taconic  
The Chop House

The Sharpe Collection  
Townsquare Media  
Warner Norcross & Judd  
Wheelhouse  
Bob & Karen Wiltz  
Women's Lifestyle

## Art of Fashion & Research

Lighthouse Insurance Group Inc.

## A Conversation About Depression Hosted by Carol Van Andel

Bluewater Technologies  
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Carter Products Company  
Cascade Rental  
Dykehouse Photography  
Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore  
Goodwill Industries  
Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce  
Grand Rapids Community Foundation  
Grand Rapids Women's Health  
GYMCO Inc.  
Dr. Jana Hall  
Holistic Health Care  
Howard Miller  
I Understand  
John & Nancy Kennedy  
Leigh's  
Lighthouse Insurance Group Inc.  
Modern Day Floral  
Morningstar Health  
Jamie Mills & Jim Nichols  
Perrigo

Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services  
Pitsch Companies  
Priority Health/ Spectrum Health  
RIZE  
Rize Distribution  
Sandler Training  
Tempting Tables  
Townsquare Media  
West Michigan Woman  
Greg & Meg Willt  
Kate Pew Wolters  
YMCA  
YWCA

## Around the World

Alliance Beverage  
Atomic Object  
Scott & Heidi Campbell  
Crowe Horwath  
Brian Devries  
Good  
Grand Valley State University  
Leigh's  
Marsha Veenstra State Farm Insurance  
Media 3 Design  
Meijer  
Mitten CNC  
Mike & Rachel Mraz  
Orthopaedic Associates of Michigan  
Rocket Science  
RoMan Manufacturing  
Rowerdink Family  
Scott & Jan Spoelhof Foundation  
Townsquare Media  
Waddell & Reed





# CAROL VAN ANDEL ANGEL OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Van Andel Institute (VAI) honored donors and volunteers at the fifth annual Carol Van Andel Angel of Excellence Dinner and Award Presentation on April 27, 2017. Held every spring, the event celebrates individuals and organizations who have demonstrated excellence and made significant contributions to Van Andel Institute's mission through volunteer service and commitment.

This year, awards were presented to **Susan Jandernoa, Timothy Long, Mike and Sue Lunn, Peter and Joan Secchia and John Zimmerman**. Susan Jandernoa serves as a member of the Hope on the Hill Gala planning committee and has helped make this special event one of the most popular fundraisers in West Michigan. Timothy Long serves as co-chair for the Institute's Board of Governors and is a dedicated Institute advocate. Mike and Suzanne Lunn founded the annual Michelle Lunn Golf Outing in honor of their daughter Michelle, and

proceeds from the outing benefit research at VAI. Grand Rapids-based business leaders and philanthropists Peter and Joan Secchia are two of the Institute's most passionate supporters. John Zimmerman serves as the liaison between VAI and Fifth Third Bank, a relationship that has included 16 years of sponsorship for the Hope on the Hill Gala.

The event also welcomed new members of the Institute's Leadership & Legacy Societies, who were inducted during the awards ceremony. The Leadership & Legacy Societies honor individuals, schools, organizations and businesses who have contributed significantly to benefit the Institute's biomedical research and science education programs. The Leadership Society recognizes those who have raised more than \$10,000 cumulatively, and the Legacy Society is an honor given to those who have raised more than \$100,000 cumulatively.

**2017 Legacy Society**  
Bluewater Technologies  
Duncan Lake Middle School  
Rottman Family Charitable Foundation  
West Ottawa Purple Power

**2017 Leadership Society**  
BD's BBQ  
Bee Brave 5K RunWalk  
The Campbell Family  
Mathew & Jennifer Fahrenkrug  
Gazelle Sports  
Dan & Magee Gordon  
Paul & Sheryl Haverkate  
Stephen Klotz  
McAlvey Merchant & Associates  
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The Crown Jewel Spa & Salon  
Todd Wenzel Automotive  
David & Beth Van Portfliet  
Williams Kitchen & Bath  
Eric & Shawna Xu

(TOP, DOWN, LEFT TO RIGHT)  
DAVID AND CAROL VAN ANDEL AND ANGEL OF EXCELLENCE Awardees TIM LONG, PETER AND JOAN SECCHIA, SUSAN JANDERNOA, MIKE AND SUE LUNN AND JOHN ZIMMERMAN.



# BOARD OF GOVERNORS DINNER

The annual Board of Governors (BOG) Dinner brought together members of the BOG, JBoard Ambassadors and Van Andel Institute's leadership on May 9, 2017. Chairman and CEO David Van Andel, Van Andel Research Institute's Chief Scientific Officer, Dr. Peter Jones, Associate Director of Research, Dr. Patrik Brundin and Van Andel Education Institute's Director and Education Officer, Terra Tarango highlighted recent accomplishments and outlined the Institute's strategic vision for the future.

The Board of Governors and JBoard include the Institute's most dedicated and passionate supporters. Their efforts on behalf of the Institute are an undeniable source of support, and their leadership continues to help shape the Institute's path forward into the future. *For more information about the Board of Governors, contact Patrick Plackowski at 616.234.5030.*



(TOP, DOWN, LEFT TO RIGHT) DAVID VAN ANDEL SPEAKING; BOG DINNER GUESTS; TERRA TARANGO SPEAKING; CHRIS BARTNIK, PAT RINGNALDA, AMY VERVARAS AND JEFRA GROENDYK.



# Q&A with Chad Bassett and Rachel Mraz, JBoard Ambassadors Co-Chairs

## Finding New Ways to Learn, Connect and Give

**West Michigan natives Chad Bassett and Rachel Mraz are passionate advocates for the Institute's mission.** Bassett and Mraz are both young professionals, brimming with enthusiasm, creativity and passion for both their community and improving human health. As co-chairs for the Institute's JBoard Ambassadors, Bassett and Mraz are constantly looking for new ways to engage people from different backgrounds to help cultivate the next generation of Institute support.

Bassett, a graduate of both Notre Dame University and the University of Michigan, worked for a decade in the world of finance. His career includes positions at Bain Capital and Deloitte, and he is currently the founder and president of Good Industries, a Grand Rapids-based lifestyle brand, as well as Xplorer Technologies. A graduate of Cornell University, Mraz has cultivated a thriving career in Grand Rapids as a wealth management advisor and senior vice president at Merrill Lynch and is the founding member of the JBoard Ambassadors.

**What makes Van Andel Institute such an important part of your community?**  
**MRAZ:** Grand Rapids is a hub of philanthropy and community engagement. The Institute is really an extension of the spirit of Grand Rapids. When I was young, I was involved with so many charitable organizations by virtue of my parents being involved in the community. I lost my mom to cancer, and my husband lost his stepdad, and now I have numerous friends and family members who have been diagnosed as well. I feel like the Institute's importance to those who have been affected by cancer and other diseases in this community is really immeasurable.

**BASSETT:** For philanthropy and entrepreneurship, there is no place better than Grand Rapids. It's really great to be a part of such an engaged community that is always willing to do good. The Institute exists in a city where people want to see others be successful and help entrepreneurs grow and have all the resources that they need. The Institute is part of such a great period of growth for the region, and it's been so exciting to watch both the Institute and the city of Grand Rapids grow together.

**Why do you think it's important for young professionals to stay engaged in their community and get involved with the JBoard?**  
**MRAZ:** When we started the JBoard in 2009, I was the lucky one who didn't have a family member who was affected by cancer. I thought that if we created an organization to support the Institute's focus on cancer research, we could give people hope and empower them to take action against this horrible disease.

In December 2015, this mission really hit home for me when my mom was diagnosed with cancer. She fought bravely for two years, surrounded by supportive friends and family, but passed away in 2017. If I was passionate when I started the JBoard, I am incredibly passionate now. I think it's necessary for young people to know that they can participate in larger institutions and support something as important as the Institute's cancer and Parkinson's research. After all I have gone through, I want to tell everyone I meet, "I am part of this great group of people and you need to be too..."

**BASSETT:** When I think of the JBoard, I think of three words: learn, connect and give. The opportunity to learn is an important aspect of being a JBoard member—learning from top educators and scientists and staying informed about the latest advancements in education and research. Our members can also network and connect with other passionate, professional people, and that is a constant source of inspiration. And the ability to give, knowing that every dollar given to the Institute doesn't go for administrative expenses but right into the labs and the classrooms. That's really exciting. I think we're at an incredible tipping point in research and developing new cures for cancer and other diseases, and to be honest, it just feels good to do your part to help.

*Interested in joining the JBoard? Visit [vai.org/jboard](http://vai.org/jboard) or contact Sarah Rollman at [Sarah.Rollman@vai.org](mailto:Sarah.Rollman@vai.org).*

# Building a Career from Intern to Scientist



ALEXIS BERGSMA.

**Van Andel Institute Graduate School (VAIGS) student Alexis Bergsma loves spending long hours studying the biological basis for cancer and other human diseases.** She also loves working in a lab filled with natural light, modern architecture and advanced technology, where she collaborates with a team that feels more like a family than co-workers. Bergsma began working in the Institute as an intern, and it didn't take long for her to know that it was the right place to start her career.

"When I started my internship in my early twenties I was completing an undergraduate program at the University of Michigan, where I was in a class with hundreds if not thousands of students. I found the Institute's small size, amazing facilities and collaborative culture really inviting," Bergsma said. "Even when I was interviewing for other Ph.D. programs after my internship, I couldn't get Van Andel Institute out of my head—I just knew I loved it here."

**Treated like a scientist**  
As an intern and graduate student, Bergsma has had the opportunity to work in a variety of labs, studying everything from prostate cancer and bone diseases to Parkinson's disease. The Institute's inquiry-based learning methods were difficult and demanding, but they provided invaluable lessons that helped shape Bergsma's career as a scientist.

"The Institute's problem-based learning is a very different way of thinking, and it was hard to get used to at first," she said. "At the Institute, you're not just a passive student absorbing information—you're expected to be present and to actively engage and participate in every aspect of the lab you're working in."

The Graduate School's small size allows for an intimate learning environment, where students can directly connect and get feedback from mentors and faculty. Bergsma was surprised to find that the Graduate School's faculty treats students

like peers and working scientists with real responsibilities and value.  
"As a graduate student in this program, you're really treated like an equal, meaning people do not view you as a student here, they see you as a scientist," Bergsma said. "The attention you receive from faculty, and the quality of the mentorship, is much higher than anywhere else I've ever been."

**We get to see everything**  
While working in the lab, Bergsma and other graduate students have the unique opportunity to use some of the most advanced scientific tools available. This access gives students the ability to look at cancer and neurodegenerative diseases in multiple ways and illuminate paths to new discoveries.

"Being a student at the Graduate School means we get to see everything," Bergsma said. "Someone recently applied to be a lab technician here, and they were floored that we have access to CRISPR Cas9, which we can use to do genetic engineering. We also have a cryo-EM, which is the most powerful microscope in the world, so if there's a new technology, we are probably using it here."

**"I couldn't get Van Andel Institute out of my head—I just knew I loved it here."**  
- Alexis Bergsma

Bergsma plans to graduate in 2018, and the education she is receiving at VAIGS is giving her the tools, training and knowledge needed to pursue life-long dreams and build a career that is both fulfilling and purposeful.

"I'd love to stay on the bench, be a senior research scientist and continue to mentor other scientists," Bergsma said. "When I was younger, I knew I wanted to use my skills and abilities to help people and fix things, and now, I know that's exactly what I am going to do."



(LEFT TO RIGHT) JBOARD CO-CHAIRS CHAD BASSETT AND RACHEL MRAZ.



# SCIENCE! THE CURE TO THE SUMMERTIME BLUES



Elementary and middle school students embarked on a new adventure during Van Andel Education Institute’s (VAEI) inaugural summer camp program held in June and July. These week-long camps provided young scientists with a fun, collaborative, hands-on environment where they could let their curiosity run free. Campers spent their days working together, asking questions, designing experiments and exploring animal behavior and environmental issues facing our planet.

“The camps are all about students experiencing the things they read about in books and letting them take an active role in the learning process,” said VAEI Instructional Specialist, Lisa Neeb. “We really want students to be inspired by science and the natural world. Hopefully, they will take what they love learning about here and keep building on that initial spark of inspiration.”

Neeb and the VAEI team are already planning next year’s camp experience. They hope to grow the program and introduce even more campers to the joy of scientific discovery. ♀

“The camps are all about students experiencing the things they read about in books and letting them take an active role in the learning process...”  
- Lisa Neeb



4<sup>TH</sup> AND 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS AT SUMMER CAMP.

# TO COOKIES AND BEYOND

## Van Andel Education Institute Brings Girl Scouts to Space

**Girl Scouts aren’t just selling delicious cookies anymore—they have their eyes on the stars.** In early June, a group of 18 fourth and fifth grade Girl Scouts participated in a week-long NASA-sponsored day camp at Van Andel Education Institute (VAEI), where they learned about living and working in space.

Girl Scouts from across West Michigan participated in the camp that featured curriculum developed by NASA and guidance from VAEI’s instructors. Lisa Neeb, VAEI Instructional Specialist, always wanted to work with the Girl Scouts, and when the partnership with NASA became a possibility, she thought it was a perfect opportunity to connect the dots.

“It’s really great to see the girls excited about science, and during the camp there is a real feeling of girl power, which as a science educator is something I am all about,” Neeb said. “Women are still underrepresented in science-focused careers, so I think it’s important to

offer a camp where girls can feel empowered to explore their interest in science and technology.”

During the three-hour-a-day, four-day camp, Girl Scouts explored astronomy, physics and technology in ways that were both creative and engaging. Through a series of hands-on activities, they examined space travel and navigation of the solar system, rocket science and how living and working in space might affect the human body.

“We simulated what going to space would be like, built astronaut suits, modeled our own solar systems made out of toilet paper, launched foam rockets and created a meteor shower with space debris,” Neeb said. “The girls were ingenious.”

The campers also met and spoke with an engineer from NASA as well as scientists from Van Andel Research Institute. Neeb said the experience was both inspirational and affirmational for students just

beginning their relationship with science. “Having the girls meet with real representatives from NASA and scientists was an incredibly important part of the camp, because they could see how what they learn now can lead to a career in science or engineering,” she said. “Meeting these experts shows all the possibilities that are out there for young women interested in science. Knowing that they can be whatever they want to be is very powerful for them.”

“It’s really great to see the girls excited about science, and during the camp there is a real feeling of girl power, which as a science educator is something I am all about.”  
- Lisa Neeb

Neeb is encouraged by the first collaborative partnership between the Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore, NASA and VAEI, and she hopes to continue to foster similar partnerships with other organizations.

“It’s exciting to think that we can work with others to expand our student programming outside of the life science and biodiversity we traditionally offer,” Neeb said. “I think we will continue to look for more ways to collaborate with national science organizations, community groups, non-profits, museums and zoos in order to continue to provide diverse, creative learning experiences for our students.” ♀



GIRL SCOUTS EXPLORING AT CAMP.



GIVING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

**Do you wonder what the future looks like?** At Van Andel Institute (VAI) our scientists are working hard to create a future free from cancer and Parkinson’s disease.

Planning is one way to create a secure future for you and your loved ones while also leaving a legacy that can help patients and families for generations to come.

"I wish I could do more" is the comment we often hear from friends of the Institute.

The truth is that a gift in a will or estate plan can have a huge impact at VAI where 100 percent of your gift will go directly toward

our mission. Every dollar really does make a big difference.


Donors can designate a planned gift to specific areas of our work. Whether it's a type of cancer that has impacted your family or your passion for inspiring the next generation of scientists in our education programs, donors have the satisfaction of knowing they have played an integral part in impacting human health.

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both the donor and the charity and often achieving significant tax savings.

Donors who support the Institute through a planned gift automatically become members of Van Andel Institute’s Society of Hope. The Society of Hope recognizes individuals who have notified us that they have included VAI in their will or other deferred giving plan. Through our acknowledgment of and gratitude toward these exceptional people, we hope that their generosity will inspire others.

Is a planned gift right for you?

*To learn more and to request an Estate Planning Guide, please contact Teresa Reid, Major Gifts Officer, at Teresa.Reid@vai.org or 616.234.5040.* 

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