

Schmit, Burfeind, Thome have wealth of achievements as this year's inductees to Grafton High Hall of Fame

Three Grafton High School graduates who have distinguished themselves on local, state and global levels will become the newest members of the school's Hall of Fame on Friday, Oct. 18.

This year's inductees are Gene Schmit, a 1953 graduate known for his business leadership and support of charitable causes; John Burfeind, a 1985 graduate and distinguished oncologist; and Gregory Thome, a 1984 graduate who has served as a U.S. diplomat in Iraq, Morocco, Finland, Guyana, Brazil, Gabon and other countries.



Gene Schmit



John Burfeind



Gregory Thome

"This is a really great representation of the different things our graduates have accomplished," Grafton High School Principal Ken McCormick said of the trio.

"It's a way of showing our students what they can achieve."

Schmit, best known as a real-estate agent and auctioneer, played basketball, baseball and six-man football in high school. After graduation, he and his father established M.J. Schmit & Son Realtors and Auctioneers, now known as Schmit Realty.

A lifelong Grafton resident, Schmit is an active member of the Grafton Lions Club, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Rose-Harms American Legion Post and Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce. Grafton and Port Washington Chambers of Commerce have each named him Citizen of the Year.

Schmit has received the Melvin Jones Fellow Award and Birch-Sturm Fellowship Award from the Lions for humanitarian service. He was inducted into the Wisconsin Auctioneer Hall of Fame in 2008 and the Wisconsin Polka Hall of Fame in 2011.

Burfeind graduated from Grafton as a valedictorian with a 4.0 grade-point average. He also excelled in football, basketball and track, earning all-state recognition in football.

Businessman, doctor, diplomat

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Burfeind accepted a football scholarship to Northwestern University and ultimately graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in molecular biology. He went on to graduate from the UW-Madison Medical School and completed a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in hematology and oncology at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Burfeind practiced hematology and medical oncology in the Portland, Ore. area for four years, developing the oncology clinical rotation for the residency program at Providence Portland Medical Center. He returned to the Milwaukee area in 2003 and practiced at Columbia St. Mary's Ozaukee Campus in Mequon, where he developed the oncology program and served as chairman of the cancer committee.

Burfeind is currently an assistant professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, specializing in genitourinary oncology and helping develop the Froedtert and Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Network.

Thome has spent most of the past 25 years overseas, defending American national interests and protecting the rights of American citizens and businesses. He is currently deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Yaounde, Cameroon.

At Grafton High School, Thome was a member of the National Honor Society, earned six letters in cross country and track and represented Grafton at Badger Boys State. After graduating from UW-Madison in 1998, he joined the Peace Corps and worked as a volunteer in the West African country of Guinea-Bissau.

In 1991, Thome joined the State Department in Washington, D.C., and was commissioned as a foreign service officer in 1992. Since then, he has served at American embassies on five continents.

From 2009 to 2012, Thome was political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, Morocco, leading the embassy's policy response to the Arab Spring and political changes in the Middle East and North Africa.

In 2008, he volunteered for duty in Baghdad, Iraq, serving on a team that coordinated the transfer of economic and development assistance activities from American military personnel to U.S. government civilian agencies.

Thome speaks Portuguese, French, Spanish, Finnish and Bissau-Guinean Creole. His father is Dean Thome, a retired teacher who taught Spanish at Grafton High School.

Schmit, Burfeind and Thome will be inducted during a school ceremony at 2:20 p.m. Oct. 18. A second ceremony will be held at halftime of the football game that evening.

Founded in 2010, the GHS Hall of Fame recognizes alumni for achievements in five categories: professional, athletic/entertainment, science/technology, community/military service and entrepreneur/industrialist. Candidates are reviewed by a committee that considers their accomplishment, awards and citizenship.

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Previous inductees were Susan Hefle, William Hinz and Geoff Lohmiller in 2010, Ted Kellner and Kathy Cramer Walsh in 2011 and Ryan Cooley and Stuart Gerber in 2012.