

**Agendum  
Oakland University  
Board of Trustees Formal Session  
October 14, 2019**

**APPROVAL OF HONORARY DEGREE FOR SHELDON YELLEN  
A Recommendation**

1. **Division and Department:** Academic Affairs, Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.
2. **Introduction:** In accordance with Article IX of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, honorary degrees may be awarded by the Board of Trustees in recognition of distinguished accomplishment and service within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences, professions, and public service as recognized and supported by the University. The awarding of honorary degrees reaffirms Oakland University's scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and ties the University to the community at large.

As the CEO of BELFOR Property Restoration, Yellen has been helping repair communities that have been devastated by natural disaster to restore key infrastructure. For almost 30 years, BELFOR has been one of the first responders in some of our biggest natural disasters both here in the United States and around the world, including Super storm Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Hugo, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and more recently hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. BELFOR operates in 31 countries and employs 7700 people in 390 offices around the globe.

Yellen's atypical background further sets him apart from others. A Detroit native, Yellen began working as an 11-year-old and dropped out of high school to support his family. His determination led to increasing responsibility and his ingenuity led him to establish businesses. His entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to learn from his experience, peers, mentors, friends and employees are keys to his success. Further evidence of his commitment to education was his decision to complete his high school diploma at the age of 53 - not because he had to in order to succeed.

He has built a company culture that recognizes employee contributions to the success of the enterprise. Despite being the head of a global enterprise, he consistently affirms that BELFOR employees all work with him rather than for him. Each year he personally signs 8000 birthday cards for his employees to demonstrate that he sees them as part of a family. When he turned 60, his employees from around the world reciprocated by sending thousands of personal birthday greetings. His approach to his business has drawn international attention and landed him 3 appearances on the CBS television show Undercover Boss.

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Some of Yellen's accomplishments and approaches that impressed the committee are:

- Yellen is the CEO of BELFOR Property Restoration the worldwide premier disaster restoration company serving 31 countries with more than 300 offices and employing more than 8000 full-time experienced restoration specialists who are dedicated to "Restoring More than Property."
- His company not only restores property but attempts to restore a semblance of normalcy to those struck by some of the world's worst disasters.
- He communicates that BELFOR 's employees work with him not for him creating a company culture that stands out in its understanding of the value employees bring to their jobs every day. He believes the company culture is the real key to success with key elements being maintaining and building strong relationships, being nice, which means being genuine and respectful.
- He is committed to authenticity and being real - he has written birthday cards to employees for 30 years creating lifelong friendships along the way.
- In January 2019, Yellen announced a new educational documentary series, Rescue Heroes, to air on ABC.

3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board of Trustees periodically awards honorary degrees at its Formal Sessions.

4. **Budget Implications:** None.

5. **Educational Implications:** The awarding of honorary degrees is an established tradition in academe, by which the University reaffirms its scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and its ties to the wider community.

6. **Personnel Implications:** None.

7. **University Reviews/Approvals:** The Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has recommended approval of the recipient to receive an Honorary Degree.

8. **Recommendation** RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Science *Honoris Causa* to Sheldon Yellen.

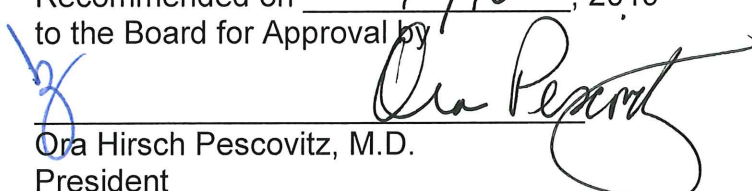
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9. Attachments: None.

Submitted to the President  
on 10/08, 2019 by

  
James P. Lentini, D.M.A.  
Senior Vice President for  
Academic Affairs and Provost

Recommended on 10/10, 2019  
to the Board for Approval by

  
Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.  
President