Texarkana, TX - Texarkana Independent School District will honor two of their own, Carl Finch and Melanie Kusin Rowe, as the 2016 Distinguished Alumni during events to be held on Friday, October 28. Both are 1970 graduates of Texas High School.

A Student Leadership Breakfast will be held from 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. at the Dan Haskins Student Center at Texas High School, 2112 Kennedy Lane. The event will offer leadership students from Texas Middle School and Texas High School the opportunity to hear from the honorees to learn first-hand how the example that you set for others, and for yourself, begins at an early age in order to build a strong foundation for personal and professional growth.

From 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., a Distinguished Alumni Luncheon will be held at the Texarkana Country Club, #1 Country Club Drive, where the two individuals will be presented and awarded the honor of 2016 Distinguished Alumni.

Following graduation from Texas High School in 1970, Carl Finch attended Texarkana College for a year and then moved to Denton, Texas to study Art and Music at the University of North Texas. There, he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design and Advertising Art in 1975 and his Master of Fine Arts in Drawing and Painting in 1978. While visiting Texarkana during a break from his graduate studies, Finch happened into an old Woolworth store downtown, discovering several stacks of reduced-price vinyl polka record albums.

This finding eventually led to his forming of the band, Brave Combo, in 1979, with the primary goal to expand polka awareness and take the music into non-polka venues and settings. Brave Combo, due to its unusual take on music, met with immediate success in North Texas and was encouraged to take the show on the road.

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After receiving a rave review in *Texas Monthly*, for its first recording, Polkamania, interest in the band spread all over the United States. *Rolling Stone* took notice and ran two pieces, leading Brave Combo to book its first show in New York City. In the audience were several nationally-influenced rock music writers, including Lester Bangs, from *The Village Voice*, who wrote fondly about the band for years to come. This was the beginning of a career for Finch that continues today.

Since that time, Brave Combo has released over 40 albums, domestically and internationally. They have received seven Grammy nominations with two wins for Polkasonic in 2000 and Let’s Kiss in 2005. They have provided music for various movie soundtracks including Envy, Fools Rush In, Dragon Ball Z and David Byrne's True Stories. Their music has been part of television programs such as *Cheers*, *Ugly Betty*, *Bakersfield PD* and *Futurama* and they have made frequent live performances on national radio shows including a Prairie Home Companion with Garrison Keillor and Mountain Stage.

Finch and Brave Combo have provided music for Olympic ice dancers Elizabeth Punsonal and Jerod Swallow during the 1994 games in Lillehammer, Norway; recorded and produced the critically acclaimed album, *Girl*, with eccentric crooner Tiny Tim; and arranged the music of Must Be Santa for Bob Dylan's Christmas album.

Brave Combo’s influence can be heard world-wide. Musicians and bands from Amsterdam to Rome to Osaka, Japan have recorded Brave Combo songs. In fact, one of their songs, A Way to Say Goodbye, charted on TOKYO FM.

With the band, Finch has done live performances all over the United States, Europe and Japan. From Lincoln Center in New York City to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. From the Kennedy Center in Washington to the MGM Grand in Las Vegas with Drew Carey. Other live performances include: Getty Museum in Los Angeles; Great American Music Hall in San Francisco; Levitt Pavilions in Los Angeles, Memphis and Hartford; Bumbershoot Festival in Seattle, Washington; Austin City Limits Festival in Austin, Texas; Roskilde Rock Festival outside of Copenhagen, Denmark; Le Printemps de Bourges in France; Lowlands Festival in the Netherlands; Steirischer Herbst Festival in Austria; and the Alternative Polka Festival in Germany.

In addition to leading Brave Combo, Finch has worked in various other aspects of music, including: producing albums for well-known folk artists such as Sarah Hickman and Trout Fishing in America; overseeing production of several Conjunto and Tejano albums for Rounder Records out of Boston; recording albums with artists including punk rock/jazz/percussionist/vibraphonist Mike Dillon, accordion virtuoso Guy Klucevsek and button box traditionalist Danny Jerabek; performing and producing music for many popular Japanese Anime television shows, including Dragon Ball Z, Yu Yu Hakusho and Blue Gender.

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In 2001, Finch was awarded The University of North Texas Outstanding Alumni Service Award and in 2016 he was inducted into the International Polka Association Hall of Fame in Buffalo, New York.

Finch continues to make music and tour with his band. He is married to Jane Beaver Finch from Queen City, Texas and they have several dogs and cats. They are both contributors to energy funds and animal rights organizations.

Melanie Kusin Rowe serves as Vice Chairman of Board & CEO Services practice at Korn Ferry International, based in New York, New York.

She has completed CEO searches across the global consumer space including FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods), restaurants, retailers and other product and service businesses, for Fortune 500 companies, privately held corporations and private equity firms. Global CEO projects Kusin Rowe has led include Estee Lauder, Chanel, JC Penney, OSI (Outback Steakhouse), Toys “R” Us and Dunkin’ Brands, among others. She also places Board of Directors for major public corporations along with advising on succession management.

In addition to her search experience, Kusin Rowe has authored articles and research around CEO succession and CEO’s relationships with their boards. She has been a frequent contributor to the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, CNN and the Harvard Business Review.

Prior to joining Korn Ferry, Kusin Rowe served as Vice Chairman of Heidrick & Struggles from 2003 until 2010, where she also led the Global Consumer Practice in charge of retailing, fashion, luxury and cosmetics industries.

Earlier in her career, Kusin Rowe headed the Global Consumer Sector with Russell Reynolds Associates. She was also in marketing and account management for Ogilvy & Mather, the leading global advertising agency, managing assignments for global packaged goods companies such as General Foods, Clairol and International Playtex.

Kusin Rowe has provided commentary for television and radio on “the corner office” and boards dealing with succession issues. She is a regular speaker on retailing trends and leadership for national trade associations and the investment community and was profiled in The Global 200 Guide to the Top Recruiters in the World.

Kusin Rowe earned her Master of Business Administration in Marketing & Finance from Tulane University A. B. Freeman School of Business in New Orleans, Louisiana and her undergraduate degree in English Literature from Sophie Newcomb College Institute of Tulane University.

She is married to Roger Rowe and they have one daughter, Avery.

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Since 1992, TISD has sponsored a Distinguished Alumni Awards program to recognize the outstanding personal and professional achievements of their alumni. These outstanding former Texas High School and Dunbar High School graduates are models to current and future alumni in terms of their professional, leadership and ethical standards. Past award recipients have been: Truman Arnold, Dr. Lenox Dial Baker, Miller Barber, Melvin Bradley, Dr. Karen D. Bradshaw, Billy C. Burnett, Ned Burns, Dr. William Dorland, Lt. Col. Norman “Ken” Dyson, Theron Goynes, Dan Haskins, Ethel Pauley Jones, David Kusin, Gary Kusin, Prudence Mackintosh, Donald Ray McNeal, George McWilliams, Rick Minter, Jerry “Boo” Mitchell, Jr., Josh R., Morriss, Martha W. Morriss, Lt. Col. Daniel Oosterhous, H. Ross Perot, Dan Petty, Col. Willie Pollard, Jr., Collin Raye, Bill Rogers, Marjorie Scardino, Vicki Schultz, Robert Wickliffe “Wick” Temple, Dr. David Tilson, III, Sheilah Walker and Dr. Steve Woodle.

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