

# MOUNTAIN MISSION CHALLENGER

Fall/Winter 2024

The Newsletter of Mountain  
Mission School

“The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want...”  
—Psalm 23

**FEATURING:**  
*Alumni Spotlight •  
Homecoming •  
New Staff •*



# A NEW MMS SCHOOL YEAR



**W**ith the first three months of the new school year already behind them, students, faculty and staff at Mountain Mission School are settling into the 2024-2025 academic year.

"We started off the first day of school passing out bracelets that have inscribed in them Psalm 23:1 'The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need,'" said MMS Director of Education Jessica Hertzog. "We are hoping this year that each child will choose the Lord as their shepherd as they pursue education."

That theme and verse will follow MMS faculty, staff and students throughout their journeys in the current academic year, Hertzog said.

The school welcomed approximately 40 new students this year, she said, adding "excitement fills the air." Current enrollment is 176 students, including a 13-member senior class.

She noted so many of the school's students come from families seeking a safe environment for their child(ren) to be nurtured in the Lord while receiving an exceptional education and she added, Mountain Mission School remains poised and ready to offer just that to every child.

Further adding to the excitement, she said, is that several new faculty

members have joined the MMS staff this year, including Dallas and Mandy Dugger; and Christian and Tashika Cakpo (*see related story, this issue*).

A staff retreat started the new year in early August with the return of students occurring August 10. The first quarter began officially on August 14 and ended on October 17. The second quarter began October 18 and will end December 17. Thanksgiving break is set for November 28 and 29 with the traditional Indiana Christmas party planned for December 9.

Christmas break starts December 17 and students will return on January 3 to begin third quarter classes on January 7. The third quarter ends March 7 and the fourth quarter begins March 11 and ends May 23.

Homecoming is planned April 4-6 and graduation has been scheduled for May 23.

"It's been a really positive start to the new academic year," Hertzog said. "I can't say enough about our teachers and staff who help us to realize our mission statement of rescuing kids, raising leaders and reaching nations. They really do make the difference in not only educating the children in their classrooms, but in helping the whole child to develop."







## Umurerwa ADVOCATES FOR MMS, FAMILIES IN NEED

**T**he memories Liliane Umurerwa's children have of Mountain Mission School, as well as the memories she has of when the school stepped up to help her family in their time of need, have resulted in Umurerwa's continued work through the years to help other families in need to find what she found.

She continues to advocate for the school today, referring families in need to the school and what it has to offer.

Umurerwa was in Maine when she first heard of Mountain Mission School, having come to the United States from Rwanda in West Africa.

"I was a single mother of two children, a new immigrant and I had to figure out what to do," she recalled.

Her son, Cliff Gashumba, 16, was in the eleventh grade; and her daughter, Keren Gashumba, was 7 and was in third grade. Cliff graduated from MMS in 2023.

"My first impression was that it was long drive," she said. "We flew into Tri-Cities Airport and Mr. Beery came to pick us up and then he drove us to Grundy. I saw the beauty of the school and everyone was so happy to see us," she recalled.

"What I saw was a lovely, supportive community and it's something I

couldn't forget," she added. "All my worries passed away. I feel so blessed to know this school, because it was not something easy for me as a mother to do, to leave my children there, but I knew it was best for them and I decided to do it."

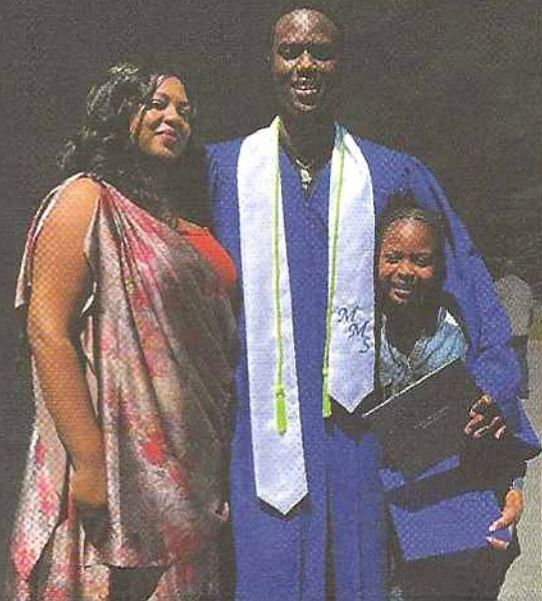
She went back to Maine and later moved to Arizona where she lives now and works as a caregiver.

She visited her children at Thanksgiving that year and saw her children were thriving and that the MMS community was a happy one.

"I saw then that my children were performing well academically and I knew the way the people at the school treated them and the way my kids reacted and felt protected," she said. "It was then I started being an advocate for the school. I have seen others in similar situations as mine and I told them, 'I have a solution.'"

Umurerwa has referred five or six families to the school, noting no one at the school has pushed her to do it, but she is quick to add that her experience with the school and that of her children is what pushes her to help get the word out about Mountain Mission School and what it offers for children and families in need.

"It's a place to be a part of community, a place to belong," she said. "We love Mountain Mission School and being a part of the MMS family. It is our second home."





# NEW STAFF

**F**our new staff members joined the Mountain Mission School family this year including Tashika Perry-Cakpo and Coffi Christian Cakpo and Dallas and Mandy Dugger.

The Cakpos and the Duggers are serving as both teachers and hall parents.



Tashika Cakpo has been an educator for more than 10 years, first teaching and proctoring classes for ServeSafe through the National Restaurant Association and since 2014, she has been teaching and serving diverse communities in countries including the Dominican Republic, Bolivia in South America and West Africa.

She has developed curriculum for international schools and worked with parents to help them discover the right learning techniques for their children. She has also served missionary families overseas as they transition their children to the United States.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in behavioral science from Wilmington University in Delaware and a Master's degree in educational leadership from Indiana Wesleyan University.

Christian is a native Beninois from the Republic of Benin. He is a graduate of CEFEB, holding a BEPC degree in secondary education. He is also a graduate of CAP/AC.

He has taught and mentored learners for more than 18 years in French, mathematics and other core academics. He has also served as an outreach director, providing outreach services including those focusing on life skills, food, clothes, bible studies, prayer meetings and/or other necessities to those in need in the Republic of Benin.

At MMS, Tashika teaches middle school reading and Christian helps with nursery and elementary PE. They also serve as hall parents on Parker 1 with the

elementary school boys.

"We encountered MMS on the ASCI website," Tashika said. "The thing that caught my eye was that the school was looking for a couple with an international feel. My husband, Christian, had never been to the United States. He is originally from Benin and I had lived outside of the country for about 10 years. MMS sounded like it would be a good diverse campus that we could transition into."



Dallas and Mandy Dugger, formerly of Johnson City, TN, joined the MMS staff, bringing with them their two children, Ezekiel, age two; and Jude, age six months.

They first learned of MMS after Mandy visited MMS several years ago while a Roan Scholar at East Tennessee State University. She visited the MMS campus and stayed for a week or two, remembering the experience.

She went back to ETSU to finish her degree, earning a Bachelor's degree in biology and later, a Master's degree in counseling with a clinical mental health concentration.

She met Dallas while working at an elementary school in Johnson City while he was working there and while she was working as an assistant director of the school's afterschool program. They later married. They are both natives of Erwin, TN; however, Mandy grew up in neighboring Kingsport, TN. In later years, they figured out they were both at Unicoi Middle School at the same time, but did not know each other then.

Dallas holds a Bachelor's degree in physical education from ETSU. He is also a preacher.

At MMS, Mandy teaches fifth, sixth and eighth grade math and Dallas teaches all grades for PE. They also serve as hall parents on Parker 2.

"We've absolutely felt welcomed by everybody," Dallas Dugger said. "We've bonded well and it's been a great experience so far. It's been a good move for us."





I'LL PUT JESUS FIRST

## Become a Part of The *Sam Hurley* Society

**F**or those who are looking to contribute to the legacy of hope at Mountain Mission School, a special opportunity exists to become a part of the Sam Hurley Society.

Hurley, who founded the school, more than 100 years ago, was a self-made man who started the school with one simple vision, that being "reclaiming the child." Generations later, it is noted his vision continues and has been further expanded to not only focus on reclaiming the child, but also to "rescuing children, raising leaders and reaching nations." It's a call we do not take lightly and one we are happy to advance in what we do here every day.

Mountain Mission School accepts no government funds and relies on its donors to help sustain its Christian mission.

Consider becoming a part of the Sam Hurley Society and by doing so, allow your legacy to intertwine with the Mountain Mission School Legacy of Hope. By including Mountain Mission School in your will, your own legacy lives on and at the same time, you make it possible for children to live a life filled with faith, hope and love.

Planned giving options include specifying a particular gift to MMS in a will or trust; designating MMS as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy; establishing a charitable remainder trust; assigning retirement assets to MMS; or conveying real estate holdings to MMS. Your financial advisor can provide more details.

*For more information about joining the Sam Hurley Society, please contact us at 276-935-2954 or email [president@mmskids.org](mailto:president@mmskids.org)*



FOR FELIPE NAVAS,

# MMS is Home

**F**or Felipe Navas, now 55, Mountain Mission School will always hold a special place in his heart. He was 13 years old when he arrived at MMS with three of his brothers after a long overnight bus trip brought them to the place they would each call home until graduating years later. A fourth brother came to MMS later.

"It was 1982 and I was 13 years old when the four of us came to Mountain Mission School," Felipe said. "Cesar was the oldest and then me and our two younger brothers, Henry and Milton. Our other brother, Erik came later."

Felipe remembers arriving at Mountain Mission School.

"We came overnight by bus and arrived at Mountain Mission in the morning," he said. "The teachers and the kids were in the playground and we went over there to check in."

The family had come to the Washington, D.C. area in the United States in 1978 from Nicaragua where they had been being raised by an aunt. He said he did not meet his mother until he was nine years old when she came to the U.S. and even then, he said she worked seven days a week, night and day. A neighbor in their D.C. area neighborhood knew about MMS and told Felipe's mother about the school. The rest, he said, is as they say, history.

At MMS, he said he and his brothers thrived. He was involved in basketball, soccer and choir and when he graduated, he went on to Johnson Bible College and then transferred to Milligan College where he was studying communications. He stayed there two years and then left, headed to the D.C. area, moving in with friends in Springfield, VA.

Felipe began working at the Springfield Mall in a retail men's store, riding a bus or bicycle to get to work. He worked in retail for about six years and then went to work for a healthcare company





in their reimbursement hub call center after connecting with a MMS alumnus, who hired him to work for the company. He continues to work there today.

He is single and quick to point out "God hasn't put the right person with me yet."

In his spare time now, he is a high school basketball referee, something he has done for 29 years. He enjoys biking and is an avid comedy buff and quipped that one day he might become a comedian in his own right.



"I love to travel," he added, noting some of the places he has been fortunate to visit include the Czech Republic, Italy, Turkey, Spain and Ireland. In the United States, he has visited 26 states.

Felipe recalled his time at MMS fondly, noting his time there made a big difference for him, creating lifelong relationships.

He thinks of Cathy Stanley as his mother, calling her on Mother's Day and on her birthday and at random times to check in.

"I call her mom to this day," he said. "Anyone can be a father and not a dad and anyone can be a mother, but not a mom. She's my mom, I can say without hesitation."

He remembers the day he met her.

"It was a Saturday morning about 9 a.m. and I went outside to shoot basketball and she was on duty," he said.

Later, he lived on the hall where she was the hall parent.

As he looks back on his time at Mountain Mission School, Felipe said that even today, he thinks of Mountain Mission School as his home.

"Mountain Mission School is my home," he said. "The difference in a house and a home is that Mountain Mission School is the only place so far in my life I have felt comfortable. I don't let go of Mountain Mission School in my heart, or in my head. I live Mountain Mission School and what I learned there every day Mountain Mission gave me so much love and I expect so much because of what Mountain Mission taught me."

Felipe said he is hard on himself, always trying to be perfect in what he does. As he graduated from MMS, he said he was somewhat naïve in the ways of the world.

"The world is a crazy place," he said. "There is not a lot of respect or caring out here, but Mountain Mission School taught me I was loved and when you fell, they picked you back up again. It all made a difference for me and I pray for them every day. It's such a beautiful place to me."





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[mmsKids.org](http://mmsKids.org)

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