

# MOUNTAIN MISSION CHALLENGER

The Newsletter of  
Mountain Mission School

Fall 2025



Inside:

## *Dave* the **TRAIN MAN**

"The Lord thy God will be with you  
wherever you go." —Joshua 1:9



# MMS Graduates **13** of the Class of **2025**

**T**hirteen members of the Mountain Mission School Class of 2025 earned their high school diplomas, May 23 during commencement exercises at the school. Dr. Daniel Overdorf, president of Johnson University was the commencement speaker.

David Mayer III was the class valedictorian. Gladness Peter was the class salutatorian.

Additional members of the Class of 2025 were: Hanna Admasu, Isaiah Beery, Anna Chacha, Cole Corey, Elleson Hackney, Dorca John, Autumn Mullins, Jesca Mungare, Yves Ndahiriwe, Rediet Teshome and Alliance Umugwaneza.

Overdorf grew up in the mountains of eastern Tennessee and southern West Virginia and graduated from Johnson University in 1995. He spent the next 10 years ministering with churches in Illinois and Georgia and completing graduate work with Lincoln Christian Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

He joined the Johnson University faculty in 2005, serving as a professor of ministry leadership, director of preaching programs and Dean of the School of Christian Ministries. He assumed the presidency in July 2024. He has published six books and he and his wife, Carrie, have been married for 30 years and have three children.

Paul Potter, from the University of Pikeville and Cornerstone Christian Church, was the baccalaureate speaker. He recalled his great-grandmother, Norah Johnson, was the niece of Sam Hurley, founder of MMS. He noted she taught briefly at Mountain Mission before moving back to Pike County, KY, where she taught in a one-room school for several decades.

“Like my other grandparents, Norah was a testament to the strength of mountain people,” Potter said. “In order to attend high school, she rode several miles across the mountains each week to catch a train to Pikeville, KY. She did the same to attend Pikeville College, where she earned a teaching degree. I’m proud to have been brought up by strong mountain people who looked into the coal-dust-covered faces of their neighbors and recognized that there was something there worth loving, something worth educating. I’m humbled to be able to do the same in my church and in my classroom.”

Mayer, son of David Mayer II and Julie Mayer, delivered the valedictory address. He plans to attend Milligan University to major in pre-medicine. He was at Mountain Mission for 12 years. He played baseball all four years; soccer and basketball for two years; was in choir for three years; was on the Servant Leadership Board for one year; and worked at the Grundy Community Center his senior year.



David Mayer III  
Valedictorian

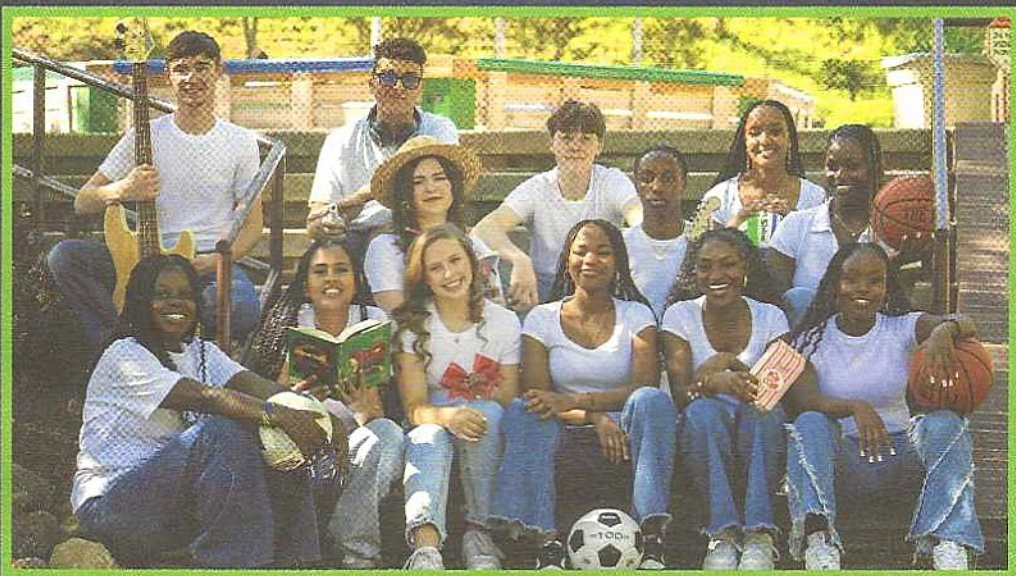


Gladness Peter  
Salutatorian



Mountain Mission School

*class of*  
**2025**



# — HONORING — JIM MCGLOTHLIN

**L**ong-time Mountain Mission School supporter, board of trustees member, philanthropist and Bristol, VA-based businessman James W. (Jim) McGlothlin died August 6, 2025. He was 85.

McGlothlin began his involvement with Mountain Mission School in 1964 as a volunteer basketball coach. As his career and business endeavors grew, so did his love and affection for the Grundy school. In 1992, he was nominated for and voted onto the Mountain Mission School Board of Trustees, where he had diligently served ever since.

"Jim's love for the school went so much deeper than simple financial contributions," said MMS President Chris Mitchell. "He truly loved the children and relished in their accomplishments."



Mitchell noted it was not uncommon for McGlothlin to remain friends with many of the school's students long after they graduated.

McGlothlin and his wife, Frances (Fran) Gibson McGlothlin, made significant contributions to Mountain Mission School through the years. In 2022, a new girls residence hall opened on the MMS campus. The building, formerly known as Toddler Hall, underwent renovations which included the addition of a second floor. This new house for the older girls who make Mountain Mission their home was named "Fran's House" for benefactor Fran McGlothlin.

In 2010, McGlothlin organized "The Big 3" PGA charity golf event at the Olde Farm Golf Club in Bristol, VA, featuring legends Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. The tournament raised \$15.1 million through donations, ticket sales and auction items to benefit Mountain Mission School. The funds raised shattered the tour record of \$8.5 million raised in one day and exceeded McGlothlin's \$12 million goal.

The McGlothlins have long been known for their dedication to education and community development and have a long-standing history of supporting academic institutions, including MMS, the Appalachian College of Pharmacy, the Appalachian School of Law, Emory & Henry College, Milligan College, King College, Virginia Commonwealth University and William & Mary. Additionally, they have been long-time supporters of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. McGlothlin also previously served on the PGA Tour Golf Course Advisory Board and the boards of CSX and Bassett Furniture.

The McGlothlins have their own charitable foundation, which makes donations to higher education; the arts; and healthcare institutions. Additionally, they are involved with The United Company Foundation, the United Company's philanthropic arm.

McGlothlin was born in Grundy, VA, the son of the late Woodrow and Sally Ann McGlothlin. He was educated in the public schools of Buchanan County, graduating from Garden High School (now ACP's campus), where he played both football and basketball. He attended The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1962. He earned a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) degree and a Juris Doctor degree from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law at William & Mary.

He returned to his hometown of Grundy following law school where he practiced law as a partner in the law firm of Street, Street, & McGlothlin until 1970 when he purchased a

Buchanan County coal company at auction and gathered six partners to start United Coal Co., which became a billion-dollar business by the time it was sold in 2009. Through the years, various other assets were sold, however, McGlothlin retained The United Co., which diversified into a hospitality and wealth management company. The company also focused on real estate development and coal, oil and gas exploration services. McGlothlin stepped down as CEO of the company in 2022, but remained as the company's chairman.

In recognition of his lifelong achievements in business, his significant philanthropic support and his impact on statewide economic development, Virginia Business Magazine named Jim McGlothlin its 2022 Person of the Year.

The McGlothlins have also been large supporters of the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center and its School of Medicine where the medical education center is named in their honor.



“His impact on this community and beyond will be greatly missed by so many,” Mitchell said. “We considered him not only as a trustee, board member, contributor and friend -- he was more. He was family. There will never be another Jim McGlothlin. We will miss him tremendously. Our hearts and prayers go out to his dear family, whom he loved very much.”

McGlothlin is survived by his wife, Fran, three children and six grandchildren.

## CHACHA SIGNS WITH RADFORD UNIVERSITY!

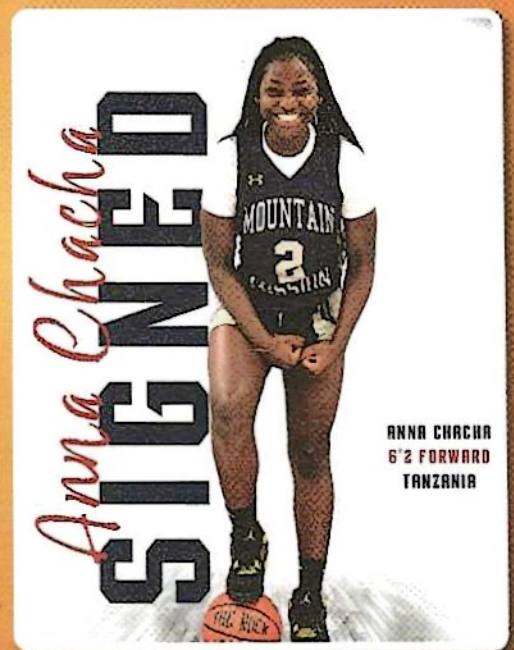
Anna Chacha, daughter of Debora Chacha and Chacha Megewa, signed with Radford University to play basketball.

While at MMS, the 2025 graduate scored 1,231 points prior to finishing her senior year. She averaged about 400 points per year, 20 points per game and 12 rebounds per game. Josh Beery was her coach at MMS.

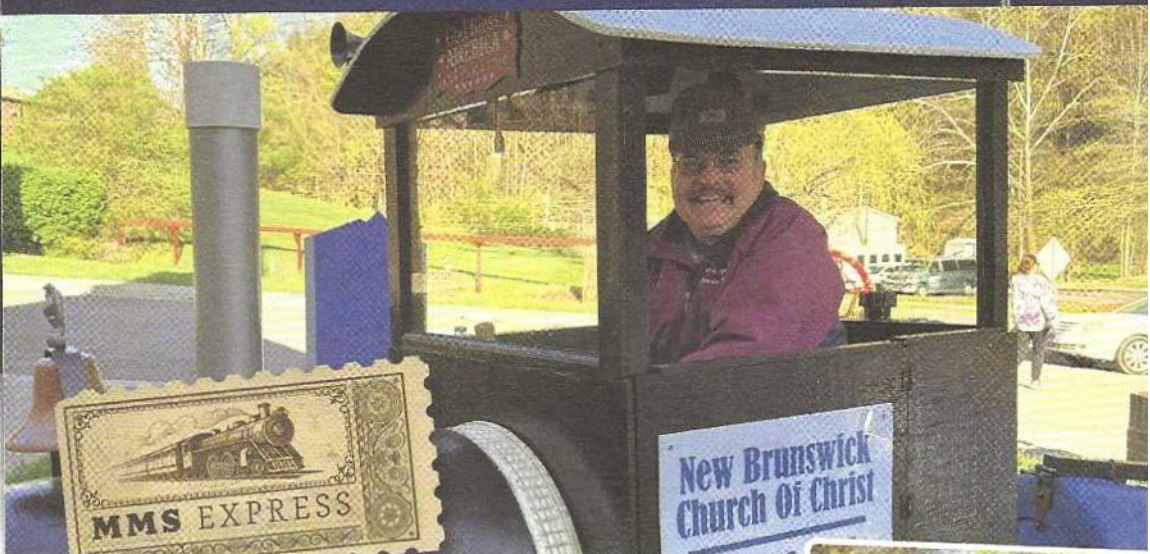
In her senior year, Chacha earned the Player of the Week by WBCA (March 13, 2025). Additional awards during her high school career included: freshman year, she received the most improved award in basketball; in her sophomore, junior and senior years, she received the MVP award in basketball; and in her sophomore year earned the Distinguished Christian High School Student Award (Outstanding Achievement in Athletics) and her team won the Division 4 NACA tournament.

“I chose Radford University because it will help me financially and I believe it could make a difference in my life,” Chacha said. “When practicing and talking with the team, it felt like this wasn't my

first time with them; they made me feel welcomed. Also, the environment feels like it is the right place for me.”



# Dave Brings Joy to MMS CAMPUS with Miniature Train



The smiles on the faces of the kids and the laughter he hears as he drives his miniature train around the Mountain Mission School campus are one of the things that keeps Dave DeNeal, of Lebanon, IN, coming back year after year.

For the past 15 years – with the exception of the COVID year and a year that flu was rampant on the MMS campus -- DeNeal has made the trip back to Mountain Mission School with the miniature train he; his father-in-law, Don Hudson; and Richard Witt built.



The train started out as a hobby project for DeNeal, who wanted to build something fun for his grandchildren. The train cars were fashioned out of barrels with

three of the cars cut out a little wider to accommodate adults. At first, it was pulled by tractor, but a train needed a train engine and so Hudson stepped in to build a box around it all to make it look like a train engine. The rest, as they say, is history.

DeNeal and his wife, Terri, first learned of Mountain Mission School through their church, New Brunswick Church of Christ, when Preacher Clarence Greenleaf first

visited the church many years ago prior to his death in 2004. However, it wasn't until the church was planning a mission trip to the school some years later that they first made their trek to Grundy -- train in tow.

"It's something he looks forward to every year," Terri said. DeNeal agreed, noting Mountain Mission School "is a really special place."

The train, he added, "is always a big hit with the kids."

DeNeal has operated Dave's Appliance Service, Inc. for the past 47 years and when he makes the trip to Grundy, it isn't all about fun and games. He volunteers his time to help with any repairs needed at the school and also takes care of any repair and maintenance needed on any appliances at the school while he is there.



# NATHAN RODDA



**N**athan Rodda always dreamed of becoming a commercial pilot and in March 2024, that dream became reality as the 2009 Mountain Mission School graduate, became a commercial pilot flying for Piedmont Airlines.

Currently, the York, SC, resident is a First Officer and hopes to achieve the rank of Captain in early 2026.

After Rodda graduated from MMS, he went on to Milligan College, now Milligan University, where he graduated in 2013 with a degree in Exercise Science. After a short time in the Navy, he began working at Verizon and for the next eight years, was there, before choosing to pursue his career as a pilot.

He began working on his pilot's license in 2013 and in 2024, completed the requirements, earning the license he had dreamed of obtaining.

While working for Verizon, Rodda was in the Abingdon store where he met Vanessa, who worked in the Bristol Verizon store. The rest is now history.

"On our first date, I took her on a flight around the Tri-Cities area," Rodda said.

In March of 2018, the couple married and now have two children, A.J., age six and Ariana, age four.

For Rodda, who grew up at Mountain Mission, the son of Bill and Cindy Rodda and grandson of Marvin and Charliece Swiney, Mountain Mission was more than just a school.

"I was practically born in the teacher's lounge," he quipped, noting that from birth until just before he graduated from Milligan, MMS was home.

When Rodda went to work for Piedmont, he was trained by Andrew Hardin, another MMS graduate.

"He kept encouraging me," Rodda said, noting that Hardin's father, Todd Hardin, had been his teacher at MMS.

"All my woodshop and manufacturing skills came from his Dad and I think of him quite often," Rodda said of Todd Hardin.



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

While at MMS, Rodda was involved in basketball, soccer, track and choir and was also a member of the local fencing club. He helped to mentor the MMS Lego robotics teams and was also a member of the drama club and took part in the annual Christmas Dickens dinner. He also assisted with groundskeeping, landscaping and mowing at the school.

"Mountain Mission School was so incorporated into every aspect of my life," Rodda said. "One of my favorite memories was going on the senior trip and one of the best memories of my life was going to the Grand Tetons."

Christmas at Mountain Mission was also always a special time and one he said he will not forget.

"The school will always hold a special place in my heart," he added. "I have been to every homecoming since I graduated and I plan to go to the next one."

Now, living in York, the family has a horse farm and a small pond on the property which they keep stocked with fish.

"It's as close as I can get to raising kids in an atmosphere like I had at Mountain Mission School," Rodda said. "MMS taught me so many life lessons. I was shown the value of having a safe place, a place where a kid could be a kid which is missing in so many parts of the world today. I learned the value of integrity, caring for people and the power of forgiveness. It's hard to bottle up what this place means to me."





1760 Edgewater Drive  
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[mmsKids.org](http://mmsKids.org)

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# 2025-2026 ACADEMIC CALENDAR



- Oct. 1 ..... Picture Day
- Oct. 10 ..... Quarter 1 Ends
- Oct. 15-19 ..... Fall Choir Tour
- Nov. 27-28 .... Thanksgiving Break
- Dec. 8 ..... Indiana Christmas Party
- Dec. 16 ..... Quarter 2 Ends/Semester 1 Ends
- Dec. 16-Jan. 5 Christmas Break
- Jan. 6 ..... Quarter 3/Semester 2 Begins
- Mar. 6 ..... Quarter 3 Ends
- Apr. 1-3 ..... Easter Break/Spring Clean-up
- Apr. 17-19 .... Homecoming
- May 17 ..... Baccalaureate
- May 21 ..... End of Quarter 4/Semester 2 Ends
- May 22 ..... Commencement