

MOUNTAIN MISSION CHALLENGER

The Newsletter of
Mountain Mission School

Spring
2026



“For I know the plans I have for you ...
plans to give you hope and a future.” – Jeremiah 29:11

HOME COMING 2026

MARKED BY
LOVE & LAUGHTER



Mountain Mission School celebrated homecoming April 17-19 on the school campus, enjoying time for classmates, faculty, staff and students to interact and time for alumni to enjoy reconnecting.

"We spent many days planning and praying for homecoming weekend," said MMS staff member and MMS Alum Wanda Beery. "Our efforts and prayers were answered far above what we could have asked or imagined. Our alumni and friends returned to campus with hearts filled with joy, love and reunion. They blessed our campus with a desire to reconnect, express gratitude, relive great memories and just have fun. It

was a beautiful weekend of family."

Homecoming began with registration on Friday morning—April 17—and featured an alumni career fair. Afterward, a kick-off picnic was held at the ballfield, where alums Moses Hayelom (Columbus, OH) and Ephrem Abebe (Baltimore, MD) cooked for everyone. The meal featured dishes from the restaurants they own. A soccer game followed between the MMS Varsity Soccer team and MMS Alumni.

"The soccer game was a hit, with many alumni wanting to take on the MMS varsity team," Beery said. "Unfortunately for our alumni, the varsity team prevailed with a score of 4-3.





The evening ended with everyone around the campfire enjoying smores."

Saturday morning – April 18 -- a prayer breakfast was held, with alumni giving the senior class advice on how to live out their faith beyond the MMS campus.

Afternoon events on Saturday included the "Leave Your Mark" handprint art project in the school building, which saw alumni leave a handprint on a painted tree in the school building, then sign their print. The palm prints made up the leaves of the trees.

Alumni then took the time to "Share a Memory" with Mrs. Barnett, who collected stories from alumni and staff with plans to

create a memory book for posterity. Next up was the MMS Varsity Basketball v. MMS Alumni game in the upper gym.

"There were so many alumni wanting to participate that we ended up creating a tournament to allow more people to participate," Beery said. "It was a great afternoon of competition and laughs."

At half time, Mini-Me challenges were featured and saw alumni and their children engaged in fun games, to the enjoyment of the crowds.

Evening events began with a reception featuring hors d'oeuvres in the Hurley Hall foyer. Alum Mike Fitch and his singing



CONTINUES...



group, "Spoken For," gave a wonderful performance for the crowd, followed by dinner. During dinner, the MMS choir gave the audience a great concert that concluded with alumni choir members joining the kids on stage for a couple of songs directed by former choir director Patti Hertzog. The evening ended with alumni hosting a dessert reception for staff at Fran's House.

Also at the dinner, long-time MMS Faculty member Paul Platt was honored by the Virginia General Assembly for his 60-plus years of teaching at Mountain Mission School. MMS President Chris Mitchell presented Platt with the framed resolution

adopted by the General Assembly.

Sunday morning -- April 19 -- began with coffee and refreshments for the early birds, followed by a worship service, where some alumni were invited to help lead the congregation in worship. The reunion ended with a gravesite remembrance of MMS founders Ma and Pa Hurley, a prayer send-off and lunch in the dining hall.

"We thank everyone who came in for the weekend," Beery said on behalf of the school. "Thank you for the many laughs that were shared and the new memories that were made."



f Sam Hurley &
Mission School



Johnson University mountain mission school

Long-Time Relationship

For the past 11 years, Roy Miller, of Johnson University (JU) (formerly Johnson Bible College) has been a regular on the campus of Mountain Mission School, bringing with him students to introduce them to the school and to take part in teacher training and observation.

MMS students also make the trip to Johnson University periodically for a preview day, to learn more about the university as they consider their next steps after graduation.

Johnson University's mission is to educate and develop students who advance the worldwide mission of Christ through their lives, ministries and careers. The university's vision is to bring glory to God and hope to the world by preparing promising students for excellence in Christian ministry through an affordable, community-oriented, Christ-centered education.

Miller spent 33 years in the Knox County School System before beginning his full-time work at JU, although he spent time as an adjunct faculty member for the university before taking on his current role. He has been a minister for more than 30 years in the Global Methodist Church.

"I first learned about Mountain Mission School from Dr. Chris Templar 20 years ago," Miller said, recalling his first visit to Johnson University with Dr. Templar, when she told him about taking students to MMS for

teacher training and getting to know the folks at Mountain Mission a little better. "Now, some of the teachers at Mountain Mission School are graduates of Johnson," said Miller.

Additionally, Miller said an agreement between the college and MMS allows MMS faculty to take ACSI-accredited classes at a reduced fee online which can then be used for continuing education credits or toward a graduate degree.

"We've found great opportunities to partner with Mountain Mission," Miller said. "The board of trustees at Johnson and others have created opportunities for any Mountain Mission School graduate to come to Johnson for free through a scholarship."

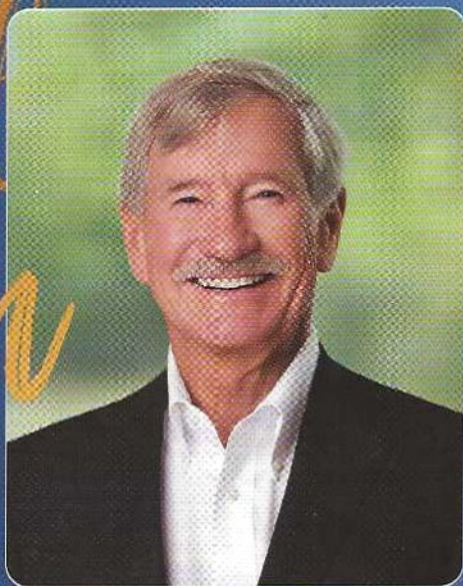
As recently as April, Miller brought a group of students to campus to visit and to learn more about what it is like to be a teacher at Mountain Mission.

"For a person who wants to immerse themselves in education 24-7, who lives, teaches and eats with the kids, it's such a rewarding job," Miller said of life and teaching at MMS.

He noted the seeds planted through the years in the relationship between Johnson and MMS have come to fruition and have been good for both Johnson and MMS.

"Currently, we have eight or 10 Mountain Mission graduates attending Johnson," Miller said. "It's now truly a part of who we are."

Michael Quillen



NAMED MMS CLASS OF 2026 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

Mountain Mission School will welcome Michael J. Quillen to campus Friday, May 22 as the commencement speaker for the Class of 2026. Commencement exercises will get underway at 10 a.m. in the school auditorium.

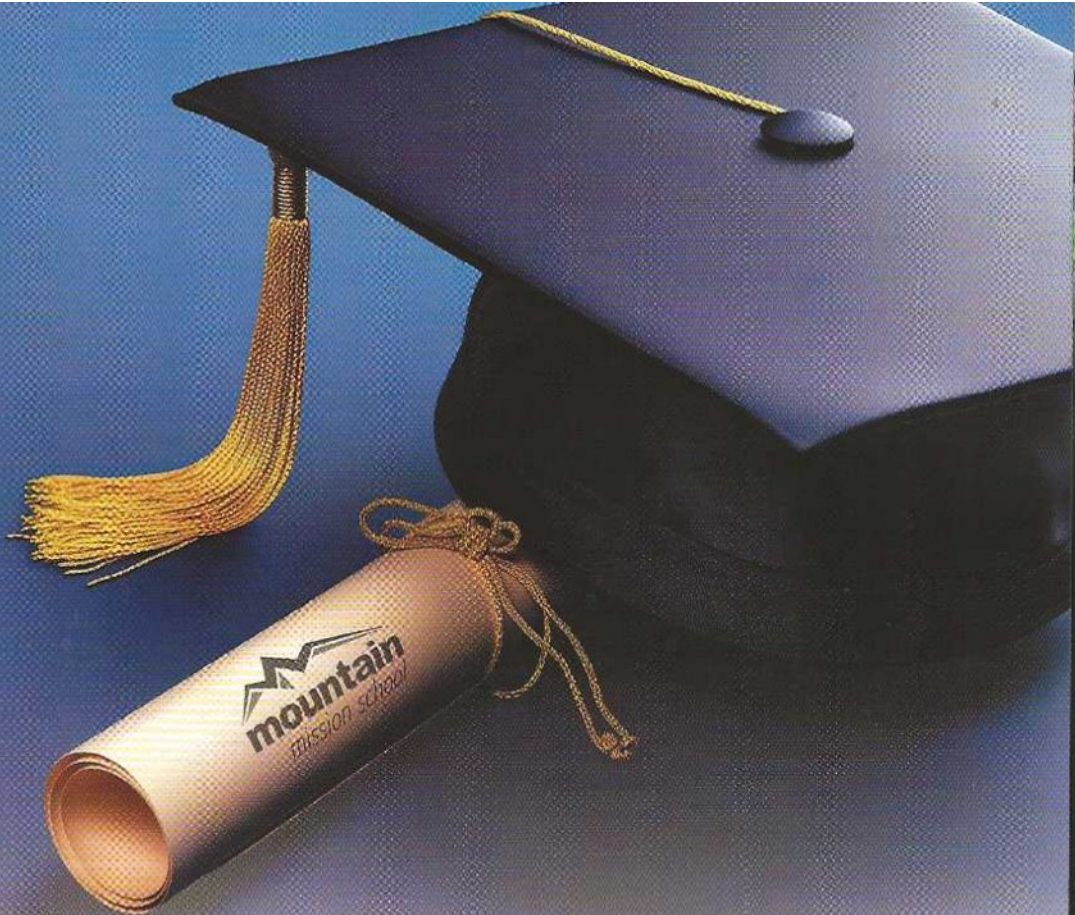
Quillen has been involved in the coal and energy business for more than four decades and has spent an equal amount of time in economic development in Southwest Virginia and in East Tennessee. He serves on a number of boards and councils in the region, including as a member of the Mountain Mission School Board; and the Ballad Health Board of Directors and its finance and audit committees. He is chairman of the SWVA Energy Advisory Council and serves on the GO VA Region One Council, where he is also a past chairman (2017-2019). He also serves on the Virginia Tech Alumni Advisory Board.

Quillen manages Quillen Properties LLC, MJQ LLC and CHM Holdings LLC and serves

as an advisor on mining, energy, economic development and transportation issues. He also served on the Board of Visitors of Virginia Tech (2010-2018) and was Rector (2013-2014); and was on the Virginia Port Authority (2003-2012), where he was chairman from 2011-2012.

In 2002, Quillen founded Alpha Natural Resources and was chief executive officer and chairman there until 2012. He was also one of the founders of Whitehaven Coal Company in Australia in 1999, where he was a member of the board and held senior leadership positions. Quillen has served in several other senior roles including as vice president of operations at American Metal & Coal International and as president of coal sales for Pittston Coal Company.

He earned a Bachelor's degree and a Master's Degree -- both in civil engineering -- from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University which awarded him the William



H. Ruffner Medal, the university's highest honor, in 2020. He achieved professional engineering certifications in Virginia, Tennessee, West Virginia and Kentucky.

Quillen has received numerous awards throughout his career in addition to the Ruffner Medal, including the Bristol Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award in January 2020; the Virginia Business Magazine Businessman of the Year in 2012; and the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year-Greater Washington Area Winner in Energy in 2006.

He resides in Washington County, VA, with his wife, Debbie; and together they enjoy their 16 grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Additional commencement activities planned for the Class of 2026 include Baccalaureate services on Saturday, May 16 at 10 a.m. George Dennehy will be the

featured guest speaker for Baccalaureate.

Dennehy has been on television and radio, performed and spoken at hundreds of live events and has shared the stage with national acts like Jeremy Camp, Audio Adrenaline, Hillsong United, Colton Dixon, Toby Mac, Jamie Grace, For King and Country and Mercy Me. He is said to provide a testimony of a victorious, overcoming life which has inspired thousands of people all over the world.

Born without arms, he plays music from his heart, using his feet. He has released a CD of original music titled 'Have my Heart.' His personal videos about music and overcoming daily challenges have been viewed more than five million times. CBS News.Com named his "Iris" video one of the "Best of the Year."

Today, George travels the world full time and loves sharing his story and his music. He lives in Virginia with his wife, Amanda; and two sons, Landon and Alaster.



MMS CHOIR UP FLORIDA TOUR

Mountain Mission School's choir recently returned from a week-long trip singing at churches in Florida.

"We started things off with a stop at Chilhowie Church of God in Chilhowie, VA, then stayed our first night in Charlotte, NC," said MMS Choir Director Kyle Crafton. "The next day was a long travel day and we made it to Orlando, Florida that evening."

Once there, the choir sang at Legacy Christian Church in Lakeland, FL; and then that same evening at Southwest Christian Church in Ocala, FL.

The group stayed a few nights at North Florida Christian Camp with one of the highlights there being a dinner concert where the MMS Choir sang while local church groups enjoyed a meal together.

"We wrapped up the tour singing on Sunday at First Christian Church in Titusville, Florida," Crafton said. "It was pretty neat being just a couple miles from the Artemis II launch site -- even though

we were a few days early for the launch.

"Overall, it was a great trip," he said. "The kids represented the school really well, were well-behaved and made some great connections with the churches we visited."

Members of the MMS Choir include:

Alto: Selome Alemu, Mariamawit Bifa, Gelila Fikru, Bethel Mesfin, Ashley Ndayisaba, Hewanawit Zerihun, Sadie Mullins and Paulina Paul.

Baritone: Emmanuel Maginga, Ezekiel Peters, Aime Uwumugisha, Yeshua Uwumugisha, Henok Yismaw, Ivan Ndahiriwe, Noah Taame, Alexandra Nyakemori and Kabrone Woldearegay.

Soprano: Sarah Belay, Hildana Dotele, Atete Kabuto, Elena Mayer, Yohana Mesfin, Promise Sisay, Leya Teferi, Elshaddai Teshome, Eleni Tasew, Bethel Banko and Chloe' Rucogoza.

Tenor: Elawi Dawit, Yoseph Burusi, Yonatane Wolde, Biruk Kifle, Aaron Negussie, William Ross, Ian Rudasunikwa, Yadel Dawit and Nebu Amedmariam.





MMS EARN S SECOND PLACE NACA FINISH

Mountain Mission School's Varsity Boys Basketball team finished the 2025-26 season with a 19-8 record and a second place finish in the National Association of Christian Athletes tournament at Fort Bluff Camp in Dayton, TN.

"We advanced to the championship game of the NACA tournament, but fell short 52-44 to a very good team from Fort Lauderdale, FL- Elite Academy," said MMS Coach Josh Peters.

To advance to the championship game, the MMS team defeated Restoration Academy from Fairfield, Ala., 51-45 and then defeated Wesley Christian from Allen City, KY, 53-50 in overtime.

"We had two players named to the all-tournament team, Emanuel Maginga and Elawi Dawit," Peters said.

"We graduate six really good seniors who have given so much to the program this year," he added.

Members of the MMS 2025-2026 team were (seniors) Alex Nyakemori, Emmanuel Maginga, Elawi Dawit, Ivan Ndahiriwe, Ezekiel Peters, Ian Rudasunikwa; (juniors) Nebu Amedmariam, Yoseph Burusi, Biruk Kifle and Eddy Ntakirutinka; and (sophomores) Ebenezer Paulos, Mark Sseruwagi and Henok Yismaw.





ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MMS is Woven Into the Fabric of Lisa Peters' Life

For Lisa Peters (Class of 1986), Mountain Mission has always been there, woven into the fabric of her life and a part of it since she was six years old.

Lisa and her family, from Greensburg, PA, used to visit the campus regularly and for good reason. Lisa was the youngest of nine in the family and her brother, Ernie Hertzog, was already a teacher at MMS; and her sister, Cathy, was the librarian. Both also worked as hall parents. They came to visit them and eventually, Lisa, her parents and sister, Lori, moved to Grundy and to MMS. Once there, Lisa says it was wonderful to get to know and spend time with her nieces and nephews who were already there.

"I look back and there were so many blessings," she says.

Her mother, Alice, worked in toddler hall and in the kitchen; her father, Edward Jacob, who was already retired, worked in maintenance and was a volunteer. Lisa and her sister, Lori, became students, finishing out their high school years.

Lisa says she quickly acclimated to the new school and played softball and had the opportunity meet so many students of different backgrounds and cultures.

"MMS really helped my confidence level," Lisa says. "Where we were before, I felt like a dot. The high school in Greensburg

was huge and I was dreading going to it because it was so big. Then it all changed when God moved us to Grundy.

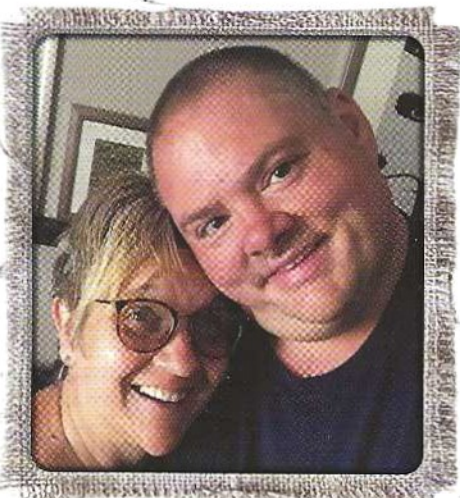
"At MMS," she continues, "we knew everybody. It was such a huge blessing. I was part of the Student Government Association, the Adventurous Christians Youth Group, was manager of the basketball team and was in choir. I wouldn't trade my experiences there as a student for anything."

Both girls finished their high school years and upon graduation, each went to Milligan College in turn. Lisa earned a teaching degree in elementary education which set the stage for the next chapters of her life. Her parents moved back to Greensburg and she was making the decision on what step to take next.

"I finished up and was ready to go and see the world, but it's funny how God works," Lisa recalls. "Mr. Platt called me as I was graduating from Milligan and reminded me he did not have my application to be a teacher at MMS. I remember laying on my college bed and crying and arguing with God as I had to make the decision of what to do."

She chose to take a job in Tennessee at Tri-City Christian and taught there for eight years. She went back to MMS often, visiting Ernie and Lori, who had also started working at the school as a teacher. In that same time period, her father died and her mother moved to Tennessee to be near her. She took care of her mother, taught school and life moved along.

"I love the idea of how God put a full circle in my life," Lisa says, noting life changed



for her in one spring weekend when she went back to MMS for the Sportsmen for Christ basketball tournament. She met Josh Peters. He had also gone to Milligan College, was single and at MMS was teaching and coaching several sports and living on Parker Hall 2 where her brother, Ernie was also living. Looking back, she says she thinks her brother and sister had ulterior motives in making the introduction as they made sure she met Peters. She recalled attending the basketball game and as she made her way down the bleachers to leave, she touched Josh on the shoulder to tell him goodbye.

As she was leaving to return to Tennessee, her sister asked what she would do if Josh were to call her. That made her think. What would she do?

"Josh was really polite and kind ... a really nice guy," Lisa recalls, adding she was older and never really expected him to call.

"But then, one day I came home from school and Josh called," she says. "We talked for about an hour or so and he asked me out over the weekend."

Lisa accepted the invitation saying she quipped with him that since he was paying, she would go. That was the first weekend in March of 1999.

"I remember that at one time I made a list of what I wanted in a man I would marry," Lisa recalls. She had tucked the list in her Bible, forgetting it was there, but just as she and Josh began to date, the list fell out of her Bible. It was almost like a sign, she says.

"Josh was everything I had written down that I wanted," she says. "By the second date, I knew I would marry him."

By April, they were engaged and on June 19, 1999 they married. This year, the couple will celebrate their 27th wedding anniversary.

Deciding where to live as they began planning their life together, Lisa says she tried to convince Josh to move to Tennessee, but he told her he had been called to MMS.

"He loved Mountain Mission School and we decided MMS was the place to be," Lisa says.

They began their married life at MMS, living



in Parker Hall - where they lived for eight years -- both teaching and caring for the students there. Lisa taught kindergarten and later through the years, students up to grade five. She now teaches Bible classes for the elementary students. They moved to Hurley Hall and were there 14 years before moving off campus.

They had three children, all born and raised at MMS - Delaina, who is now a kindergarten teacher in Virginia Beach; Jacob, who is a student at Old Dominion University; and Ezekiel (EZ) who graduates from MMS this year and is headed to Tidewater Tech in Northern Virginia to study HVAC.

Looking back on life and how it's turned out thus far, Lisa says she knows her life and the lives of all those at Mountain Mission School have been touched by God.

"I love it here," she says. "I love the community and the staff and I love how everybody here loves the Lord. The Holy Spirit lives here. God's arms are wrapped right around Mountain Mission School. It's a beautiful place to be raised as a child and it's been a beautiful place to raise children."

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right around Mountain
Mission School.



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Mountain Mission School
admits students of any race,
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SEBRING OH 44672-1562

WHEREVER YOU ARE, you can help care for these precious kids.

Mountain Mission School has never received any government assistance, so we rely on the Lord to work through friends like you for our kids' sustenance.

It costs more than \$15,000 per year to house, feed, educate and provide healthcare for each of our children. That amount may be out of reach for many donors—but if 10 of our friends give \$125 per month, they've achieved a total that covers one child.

Won't you please consider using the envelope in this issue to make an ongoing gift? You'll be playing a vital role in the daily care of kids like little Lydia (pictured).

And if you happen to know a child in need, please contact us.

