

VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL



MESSAGE FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL DEXTER MAHAFFEY

Greetings VCS friends,

The world needs Vermont Commons alums—individuals whose education was shaped by the values of service to our planet and others. Environmental stewardship and social justice have been woven through the character of our school since its founding and a great education with an eye to these two areas goes a long way toward making the difference called for by society and the planet. Vermont Commons continues to be a place where this happens with our exceptional and committed faculty, open-minded and determined students, parents who share this vision, and alums who lead by example.

By the end of this year, VCS students will have spent more than twice as many days in experiential education than in a typical year and studied through remote, hybrid and in-person models. They will have mastered new platforms for learning and the capacity to adjust among them. They will, in short, have overcome unprecedented challenges and developed resilience unique to their age.

There have been silver linings during these challenging times. The School acquired 60 acres of land in Charlotte this fall for a new Outdoor Education Center (OEC) for field study, Encounter Weeks, Core Group and Advisory outings, nature-based art, civic engagement, and environmental responsibility. Our faculty have dedicated countless hours in the last year to fulfilling mission-driven priorities of environmental stewardship and social justice. Their work stemmed from faculty committees formed in 2019 to focus on these issues; I hope you will be as inspired as I am by their important work.

Of course along the way, and despite the seriousness of these topics or the challenges of the pandemic, there's a heck of a lot of laughter: on Zoom and in our Hy-Flex and in-person classrooms on campus, on the trails at Catamount, at Jazz Band in the parking lot, during a 6th-grade Friday live-action round of *Among Us*, at a Senior gathering at the Yurt's fire pit, and on the ski program at Bolton. Wherever and *however* you find Vermont Commons students and faculty together, the joy, vitality, and Flying Turtle spirit lives on!

Best regards from all of us to all of you.



Dr. Dexter Mahaffey, Head of School



FACULTY & STAFF

Dexter Mahaffey, Ph.D. P'23 '25, *Head of School*
Kat Ahrens, *Math & Encounter Weeks*
Katherine Bailey, *Registrar & Theater*
Marta Beede, *College Counselor*
Linda Bursell, *Business Manager*
Frances Cannon, *Art & English*
Chance Cardamone-Knewstubb, *Spanish*
Mark Cline Lucey P'23 '26, *Social Studies*
Jennifer Cohen, *English*
Adriana Comtois P'27, *Spanish*
Matt Davide, *Music*
Amber Degn, *Development Officer*
Jasmine Easter, *Assistant Head of School & Math*

Peter Goff, *Class of '20 Faculty Chair, Science*
Tim Harger, *Dean of Students & Social Studies*
Ryan Houck, *English*
Mark Keegan, Ph.D., *Science*
Courtney Lamontagne, *Learning Specialist*
Steve Lausier, *Communications & IT*
Kathryn McDermott, *Social Studies*
Kristofer Mohlman, *Science & Math*
Jill Strawbridge P'20, *Director of Admissions*
Tonya Waldron, *Math*
Ben Wang, *Chinese & Encounter Weeks*
Susan Wertheimer, *College Counselor*
Amy Williamson, *Counselor*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Mark Cline-Lucey P'23 '26, *Faculty Rep.*
Rebecca Lindy Coll P'12
Andrew Furtsch P'19
Bethany Gibbs P'24, *Vice Chair*
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Craig Heindel P'03 '06, *Secretary*
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Troy Krahl P'21, *Treasurer*
Cathy Townsend P'20 '22
Pauline Tyler P'21
Rosemary Webb P'16
Corey Wheatley-Starbuck

VCS ACQUIRES 60 ACRES FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER

Outdoor experiential education has been a VCS core strength since our founding nearly a quarter century ago, yet the importance of outdoor learning has come into even sharper focus during the pandemic. This summer, our Board of Trustees completed a crucial component of our VCS Strategic Facilities Master Plan with the acquisition of 60 acres in Charlotte, 15 minutes from our main campus. Right now students are at the Outdoor Education Center (OEC) every Wednesday with Peter Goff working on a mapping study, while the Board of Trustees' Facilities Committee works through state and local permitting.

We moved quickly to purchase this land thanks to a no-interest loan from an anonymous donor, and anticipate a future Capital Campaign will include fundraising for the land purchase and light footprint—but large educational impact—infrastructure, including a four-season learning pavilion, parking, a natural trail system, two yurts for E-weeks and field classrooms, and native landscaping marking off a recreational field or two. The OEC is a game changer for VCS, allowing longitudinal environmental study for generations to come and encouraging lifelong environmental stewardship in every student. We can't wait to share our plans with you as they take shape!



FEELING THE LOVE: GRANDPARENTS AND GRAND FRIENDS DAY

"To sit in on classes with such competent, kind, enthusiastic, supportive teachers was a really wonderful experience." — Jean Richardson GP'27

On November 13, we welcomed more than 70 guests from 14 states, England, and Jordan for our first virtual *Grandparents and Grand Friends Day*. It was a day filled with joy and learning, and the special bonds between grandparents and grandchildren were palpable in Morning Meeting, right through our Zoom screens. Grands then attended classes to explore topics as varied as Islamic caliphates, Led Zeppelin, human perceptions about wolves, and live submarine experiments!



Sixth graders Eliza Richards '27 and Tessa Gordon '27 are all smiles under their masks in the Photography Encounter X.

STUDENT NEWS | OUR TURTLES FLY!



VCS National Merit Finalists

Congratulations to Sophie Dodds '21 and Benjamin Poulin '21 who were recognized as National Merit Finalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors and with PSAT scores among the highest in Vermont.

VCS Students Participate in Diversity Conference

Charlotte Dodds '23, Aidan Hall '23, Gavin Hay '23, Lily Isham '22, and Eden Smith '23 attended the NAIS Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), an online, multiracial, multicultural gathering of upper school student leaders from across the U.S. and abroad which focused on self-reflecting, forming allies, and building community.

New Student Clubs Zoom and Thrive

Izzy Stearns '21 and Finn Verdonk '22 started a new **Arts Council** this fall, **GLOWING Turtles** (Gay, Lesbian or Whatever Interest Group) returned thanks to Tess Foley-Cox '22, Zoe Hecht '22, Iain Mahaffey '23 and Finn Verdonk '22, and Charlotte Dodds '23 and Eden Smith '23 launched a **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Club** after attending the SDLC.

Simon Rosenbaum '22, Engaging with our World

Simon Rosenbaum '22 ran for the office of High Bailiff in Lamoille County, garnering considerable local news coverage. Simon felt it was “a civic responsibility to ensure a seat is contested so the voters have a choice.” Simon was also awarded Best Delegate at the Brown University Simulation of the United Nations XXIV this fall. Congrats!

National Honor Society Welcomes New Members

Magnus Ames '22
Rachel Bergstein '21, President
Tess Foley-Cox '22
Zoe Hecht '22
Iris Lawson-Ryan '22
Simon Rosenbaum '22
Izzy Stearns '21
Andrew Stern '21
Finn Verdonk '22
Ireland Young '21

Flying Turtles Named 2020 Vermont Youth Volleyball Association All-Stars

Austin Mital-Skiff '21
Magnus Ames '20
Candace Hosmer '21
Catherine Krahl '21



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

ZOE HECHT '22 EXPLORES AGROECOLOGY



By Steve Lausier, Communications

“A relatively high percent of Vermonters are food insecure, and this doesn’t even touch on the nutritional value of the food Vermonters do have,” says Zoe Hecht ’22, on one of the inspirations for her Naturalist Certificate project. “A lot of people live in [what]...used to be called ‘food deserts,’ where even if people can go buy food, they can’t get their hands on fresh produce, so a lot of folks rely on processed foods.”

Zoe, an original member of Vermont Commons’ first 6th grade class and now a junior navigating a Certificate project in the midst of a pandemic, hopes her research in agroecology can one day contribute to more food security for Vermonters. “A huge part of food justice is getting fresh produce from farms to Vermonters in a way that’s cheaper, so that people can get food that’s directly from the earth instead of from a can.”

What is agroecology? “I would define it as ecologically-informed agriculture, or the study of [it]... But it’s also a social movement. It has a couple different dimensions: one of them is a science, and the other is...sustainability.”

A target for Zoe’s project is aiding Lake Champlain. Nearby farmers commonly use chicken manure that provides nitrate, which is “a macronutrient, because it’s one of the top most important nutrients for plants.” But the manure also includes phosphorus, an excess of which is carried downstream by runoff, and in large enough quantities can contribute to dangerous blue-green algae blooms. Zoe is planting

legumes that “have a symbiotic relationship with a fungus that lives in their roots, and this allows the plant to take nitrogen gas from the atmosphere and convert it into nitrate in the soil without adding phosphorus.”

By planting legumes as a cover crop in the spring, terminating it in the summer, and planting a cash crop, “likely kale or some other type of Brassica” in the same soil, Zoe plans to study how effective the legumes are as replacements for manure. “If a plant has enough nitrogen, its leaves will be greener. The chlorophyll production in a plant is closely related to how much nitrogen that plant has, so a really common side-effect of nitrogen deficiency is yellowed leaves. I’ll use a chlorophyll meter to measure just how green the cash crop is after it’s grown.”

One of the highlights of the project for Zoe has been working with community mentor Lindsey Ruhl, of UVM’s Northwest Crops & Soils Program. “She’s just been super great. She connected me with folks at the Hort Farm and with more people in her field, so I’m really grateful to her.” Zoe also volunteered last summer at Diggers’ Mirth Collective Farm with Micah Barritt. “Lindsey’s been informing me from the science side of things, whereas Micah’s a farmer, so the two of them have been helpful in giving my project that balance.”

Zoe will also have a chance to test out Lindsey’s AgConnect app, which helps users design their own experiments and is targeted at high school and college students. “She asked if I wanted to test it out and I was like, ‘Yes!’ This is what the project is all about!”

This is not to diminish the work of her faculty mentor, Peter Goff. “He’s been really helpful with my proposal. I’ve come to him with more drafts than I can count, and he’ll read them, he’ll get back to me, he’ll ask me questions, he’ll ask me to go further, and he’ll facilitate helping me find folks who know how to help.” Zoe brought her proposal to the Science Committee last year, but was advised to flesh out the project. “I was upset at the time, but I’ve realized since then that [the faculty] really knew what they were doing. I hadn’t even found my community mentor at that point—once I found Lindsey she was pretty crucial in helping me come up with my focus on nitrates.” The Committee approved her proposal and Zoe has begun her experiment with legumes at a plot on the UVM Horticultural Research and Education Center adjacent to the VCS campus.

She plans to carry her experience beyond VCS, potentially as a biology or ecology major in college. “I know that I really enjoy being outside and looking at natural systems, and I think that this idea of using what we know about ecosystems in the growing of food is one of the most interesting things that humans are doing and have done throughout history.”



2020 GRADUATES 23RD COMMENCEMENT | FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2020

On a beautiful day in an outdoor, masked, and socially-distanced drive-in ceremony, we held our 23rd Commencement and welcomed 15 new members to our Alumni community. It was a day filled with celebration and joy, and unlike any other VCS graduation. Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Ella Dunkiel
Seth Fisher-Olvera
Catherine Isham
Sama Mahdi
Ariel Merrill-Nolte

Jess Oldham
Helena Raddock
Julian Roy
Tess Ruddy
Ella Skinner-Sloan

Reeves Strawbridge
Jackson Townsend
Milo Trabulsky
Kent Vaccaro
Owen Williams

WHERE IS THE CLASS OF '20 NOW?

Members of the Class of 2020 received acceptances to 69 colleges, universities, and postgraduate programs, and were offered \$2 million in scholarship and merit awards. They are continuing their studies here:

Bard College
Bates College
Colorado College
Columbia University
Fordham University

The Hotchkiss School*
Interlochen Arts Academy*
Lynn University
Purdue University
Skidmore College

University of New England
University of Vermont (2)
Vassar College
Washington University
**postgraduate*



Peter Goff with students in 2013.

SENIOR CLASS FAMILIES RAISE FUNDS TO HONOR FACULTY

Each year, families of the Senior Class come together to make a gift that will have a significant and enduring impact on VCS as a way of honoring their graduating children.

Last year, the families of the Class of 2020 began a new Senior Gift tradition to support the people at VCS who have the greatest impact on our students—our extraordinary faculty. They raised the inaugural seed money for a Faculty Chair Award—a fund to recognize a faculty member whose excellence inspires and embodies a love of learning and commitment to community.

PETER GOFF: FIRST CLASS OF '20 FACULTY CHAIR AWARD

Peter Goff, who has taught at VCS for 24 years, received the inaugural Class of '20 Faculty Chair Award at our 23rd Commencement in recognition of his dedication to our students and school community. As one parent nomination stated, “Peter Goff inspires students with his infectious enthusiasm. He embodies a love of learning.”

Congratulations, Peter!



Encounter Experiences are highlights for students with offerings as varied as filmmaking and songwriting to mountain biking and mapping.

ENCOUNTER WEEKS TEMPORARILY TRANSFORM INTO ENCOUNTER X

Faculty members Ben Wang and Kat Ahrens, along with student leaders, transformed our signature Encounter Week experiential learning program into Encounter Experiences for pandemic times. Every Wednesday, students participate in Encounter X—all-day, outdoor activities that bring students and faculty safely together. Offerings have included filmmaking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, Andy Goldsworthy-inspired art, songwriting, cooking, GPS/GIS mapping, origami, road biking, creative writing, and independent experiences. Students and faculty both have found these in-person experiences to be high points each week during this year of social distancing.





Peter Goff leading an Encounter Week in Maine's Acadia National Park.



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

PETER GOFF DID NOT WANT TO TEACH HIGH SCHOOL

By Amber Degn, Development Officer

Fall is tough for biology teacher Peter Goff. He freely admits that time management is tricky. There's the volleyball season and teaching and all the craziness of the start of the school year. "But, I wouldn't do it if I didn't love it," he chuckled as we met via Zoom. Instead of teaching in his black-tabled bio lab, he commands his virtual classroom wearing a plaid flannel shirt in front of a stately broken-pedimented mantel and stone fireplace in his home. It's a fitting backdrop for the man who is VCS's unofficial archive and institutional memory, and who presides over all things Green-Gray. He's been here since the beginning, longer than any other faculty member. "I signed up [in August 1996], 13 days before kids arrived, and I was the entire science department. I had to teach physics and chemistry and biology. Biology and chemistry I could stay ahead of the kids, physics was a bit of a challenge."

*"I still love going to work. It bums me out when I can't. . .
I can't imagine a better job for me or a better place to do that job."*

With remote teaching and coaching amidst a global pandemic, you might think Fall 2020 would have been more difficult than his other 24 school-year starts at VCS. But he took it all in stride, exuding his trademark calm demeanor. "We figured out online learning in the spring, and one of the things I love about VCS is that we've always been willing to experiment and fail and learn from it and move on. We're small enough that we can adjust midstream. Yes, kids need stability. However, I have been on Encounter Weeks with teenagers that would have broken adults. Teenagers' ability to bounce back and adapt is remarkable, and it far exceeds mine. There's an understandable urge to protect kids right now, but I think we underestimate kids."

Peter grew up in rural southern Maine and went to Hobart for college. His dream job was to teach in a small, liberal arts school where he could also do research. He was on that path until his wife's UVM lab partner mentioned that his family was starting a school and they needed a science teacher. That lab partner was Rob Skiff P'21 '23, who founded VCS with his father Bob Skiff and Leah Mital P'21 '23. Peter had spent six years teaching at Vanderbilt and UVM and recalls telling his wife, "I don't want to teach high school." But Bob had some interesting ideas. "I didn't realize until 20 minutes into our friendly conversation that this was actually an interview." When Peter asked about the curriculum, he learned he would be the entire science department. It was then he realized this was a career opportunity most young teachers wouldn't have for decades.

But when Peter told Bob that he didn't want to teach high school, he was unaware that Bob had a Ph.D. in psychology. Bob asked about Peter's experience coaching high school swimming, and he explained, "I like high school kids better than I like college kids. I love that instant feedback you get from high school kids...you always know where you stand. From a teaching and coaching standpoint, I find it personally much more rewarding." Bob had led him down a path to a realization he'd never vocalized. He took the job and has been here ever since.

Peter has always "admired the fact that VCS is small and agile," resulting in opportunities such as participating in two National Science Foundation (NSF) grants. "I've still been able to scratch that research itch... Because of the way the school is structured and the freedom we're given, those opportunities are still there." Though the pandemic nixed Peter's participation in a teacher program at the CDC last summer, he is one of seven Vermont educators recently selected to participate in the NSF INSPIRES Teacher Professional Learning Program focused on New England forest ecosystems.

Green Mountain Drive isn't Peter's only laboratory. Every September, Peter leads students on a trip to Maine's Acadia National Park. It's a big part of VCS culture and on those early trips he was stunned to realize there were kids who'd never seen the ocean. Acadia is an outstanding example of a community's environmental stewardship interwoven with a park system, which also reveals "what people with a lot of money can do for good... We work road crew and we've



just missed Rockefeller descendants working ahead of us. And you see whales and seals. It's wonderful."

When Peter started at VCS, there were 30 students, five full-time faculty, a water-testing company on the first floor, and a two-story boat garage where the Commons and lunch rooms are. While 75 Green Mountain Drive has changed physically, "the more striking thing about VCS is the things we have held on to. Number one, willingness to experiment and number two, the multi-aged commitment." For Peter, the fact that we still place value on these two qualities is really important. Looking back at all his years at VCS, he says the nature of our students has remained the same. "The fundamental difference between our kids and an average group of high school kids is the need to learn. At the end of the day, they want to be in class. Apathy is not something we struggle with at VCS."

It may be that they want to be in class because of Peter's proclivity for pranks. "It's a very rare class when I'm not laughing with the kids. I tell them, 'I'm usually laughing at you, but sometimes I'm laughing with you,' but the point is it's a fun place to be." For about 16 years, Peter enlisted students in a running gag convincing the incoming 7th grade class that there was a pool in the school's basement. Some students would be so convinced they'd bring swimsuits, and Peter would pack them all into the elevator and send them down to the "basement." When they couldn't find it, he'd tell them the elevator door opened on the rear, and they'd try again. One group went up and down the elevator three times before figuring it out—and the first thing they said was "We've got to get next year's class!"

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FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



“After hitting the ball into the net, [Peter] complimented me on my form, and I have not missed a volleyball practice since.”

— Magnus Ames ‘22

Peter started volleyball at VCS because it’s inexpensive, non-contact, skill-specific, and lends itself to multi-age, co-ed teams. “We can serve, pass, set. Skill becomes an equalizer.” At the introductory levels there’s no physical difference for middle school players. “It’s a very good lesson and important for boys to be around girls that they see as both teammates and competitors.” Though Peter detests administrative work, he created the Vermont Youth Volleyball Association to give VCS kids teams to play against, “and now we have high school volleyball in Vermont.”

Off the court, Peter brings friendly competition to the Commons Room. “I was part of the group of [Harry] Potter fans in 2001 looking to spice up the February doldrums. That’s why we came up with the Green-Gray competition.” If you’re wondering, Peter is on Team Gray, and Gray has garnered the most points in 12 of 20 years. “Gray is demonstrably superior, though I almost never compete.” It briefly occurred to me to wonder if we can trust this quiet prankster, but it’s clear his students and colleagues recognize Peter as an extraordinary teacher and coach who has influenced hundreds of VCS students, and that yes, absolutely, we can.

FACULTY NEWS

Focus on Environment and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice

In the last year and a half, the faculty Environmental Committee’s work has led VCS to sourcing electricity through solar power generation in Vermont and working toward on-site solar generation and electric car charging, as well as inspiring the OEC. Simultaneously, members of the Social Justice Committee have attended DEIJ conferences and training, supported students attending the NAIS Diversity Leadership Conference, provided training for the full faculty, supported student leaders doing the same for the student body, sponsored the student-led LGBTQ+ club, and started an effort to update curriculum in tandem with administrative initiatives to recruit and retain an ever more diverse community.

Welcome to our New Faculty and Staff!

Frances Cannon, *Art & English*

Amber Degn, *Development Officer*

Tim Harger, *Dean of Students*

Ryan Houck, *English*

Courtney Lamontagne, *Learning Specialist*

Amy Williamson, *Counselor*

Mark Keegan Steps Up to Make PPE

Last April, science teacher **Mark Keegan** began seeing face shield designs shared online in response to PPE shortages early in the pandemic. So Mark set up the VCS 3D printer in his basement, making some 200 face shield components for local health care and first responder personnel.

“3D printing isn’t ideal—it’s slow. But there are a lot of printers that could be tasked overnight. It was a bit like the Dunkirk evacuation—lots of individuals doing what they could, adding up to enough to matter.”

Mark took his face shields to the UVM Medical Center, where medical students operated a PPE collection program in conjunction with the State of Vermont.



Science teacher Mark Keegan using the VCS 3D printer to make face shields in the pandemic’s early days.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

FOUNDERS' AWARD RECIPIENT ADDIE JOHNSON '09 CREATES A BRAVE SPACE

Last June, **Addie Johnson '09** received the 2020 Founders' Alumni Award in recognition of her dedication to scholarship, community and global responsibility. Addie graduated from Bates College and earned a Master of Arts in Teaching with a focus on Urban Education and Social Justice from the University of San Francisco. She teaches kindergarten at Live Oak School in San Francisco where she started an Anti-Racist Educators Group in 2019.

Why I started the Anti-Racist Educator Group

My school is very progressive, and prides itself on its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work. That said, it's a pretty white space and most students are fairly affluent. I felt a huge disconnect from my graduate school work, the trauma and struggles at my previous school working with underserved and marginalized populations, and my current reality. [A colleague and I] started the group to reflect and learn about whiteness. We structure our meetings around readings from *The Racial Healing Handbook* by Anneliese Singh which proposes that before we can be effective allies, white people need to do the challenging work of reflecting on our own identity, biases and prejudices.

A Brave Space

I've been inspired by middle school teacher and diversity consultant Rosetta Lee. She speaks about doing racial justice work within a brave space, which is different from a safe space. For white people, safety is often synonymous with comfort. When we're in a place of comfort, we rarely confront the hard truths of our own biases that are entangled in our whiteness. In order to confront and dismantle the white supremacy within ourselves, we have to get uncomfortable. We have to stray from the desire to put on our "good white person" cape and instead recognize the ways we must continue to grow. I've been thinking about this as I model for my students that there's no end goal that we're striving for. Anti-racism is life-long work.

Classroom Conversations about Race

In my classroom I've been centering conversations of race as we build our community (either on Zoom or in person). Instead of thinking about race purely in terms of oppression, we're normalizing conversations about our own race and how that might be different from or the same as others. I find it's important to start with ourselves while talking about whiteness openly, so that students don't associate race and racism purely with those who have been marginalized. My goal is that when we start talking about race openly in our classrooms, white students will learn that they have a role in the conversation. Moving away from the deficit model of only talking about race when we do units on slavery or the Native American genocide helps students see the humanity within each other and across difference.



Addie Johnson '09 and social studies teacher Mark Cline Lucey in 2008, and Addie today.

The Impact of VCS

Without a doubt Mark Cline Lucey's social studies class changed the path of my life and the way I viewed the world around me. We read Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, which was the first time I learned history from a non-white Eurocentric perspective, and reading Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy* made me think about capitalism and environmentalism in a radically different way.

Mark definitely influenced me to become a teacher. He valued his students as individuals, not just as participants in his class. He cared about us beyond how we were performing in social studies. I will always remember his tradition of having students share their favorite albums. When he played mine by The Fugees I felt so excited to talk to him about the music. Mark influenced me to think of the non-dominant narrative, to question traditional viewpoints and to always, always back up your own opinion with data, logic and reason.

Above all, I decided to become a teacher and to center my teaching in deconstructing white supremacy because of the way that VCS built me up as a student, made me feel cared for, and pushed me to constantly challenge the status quo. In all of my classes, I learned about power relations and to ask whose stories aren't being heard. I vow to continue the work of the incredible educators at VCS on whose shoulders I stand!

Alumni, send your nominations for the 2021 Founders' Award to adeqn@vermontcommons.org.

ALUMNI NEWS

We love to hear from alums!
Send updates to
adegn@vermontcommons.org.

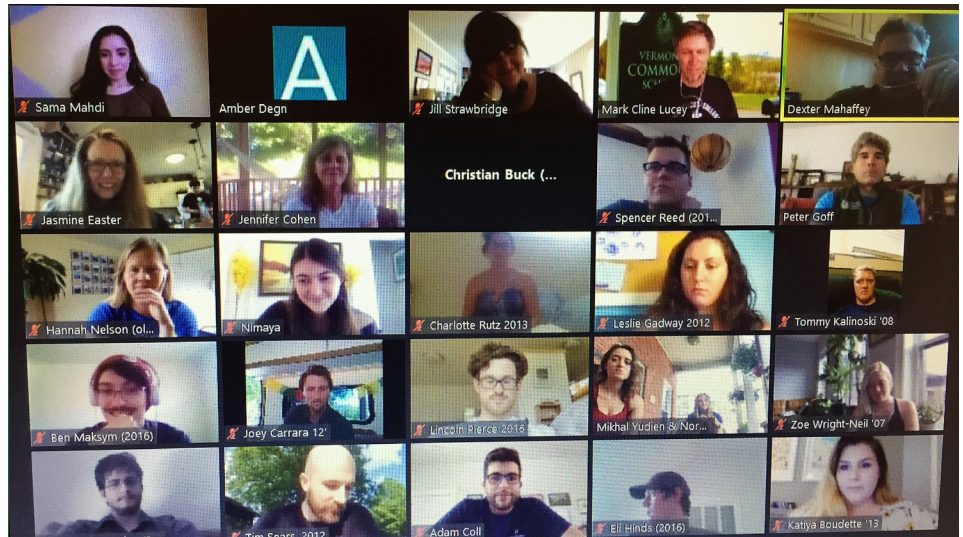
Sama Mahdi '20 organized our VCS Alumni College Panel via Zoom on June 1 as part of her Senior Project. **Jamie Benson '15**, **Matt Furtsch '19**, **Jalen Gibbs '18**, **Katya Marsh '17**, **Fiona Oldham '19**, and **Cameron Roy '19** answered questions from juniors and seniors.

Mary Cotton '00, our first VCS student, is a Speech Pathologist in the Addison County School District. Her daughter Parker is 4 ½ years old.

After 19 years working in the energy and climate sector, **Asher Burns Burg '01** shifted to Give Campus in 2020 as Vice President of Sales. He lives in Washington, DC with his wife and two children.

Greg John '01 is a pilot and owns a flight school in New Jersey where he's working on pilot training programs with local colleges. He and his wife have three children.

Mark Hemley '02 is a blacksmith and was a contestant on the History Channel's *Forged in Fire* bladesmithing competition, now on Netflix: Season 6, Episode 25, "The Falchion."



Nearly 40 alums gathered with faculty to catch up at our Alumni-Faculty Meetup on June 4. We had alums from the Class of '07 through '19, and as far away as Colorado and Oregon.

Join us for our next Alumni-Faculty Meetup on May 20, 2021.

Aaron Voldman '05 graduated from law school in May. He was sworn into the Florida bar and is an Assistant Public Defender in the Palm Beach County Office of the Public Defender.

Beth (Struhammer) Brasowski '06 welcomed her second baby Micah in December. Her three-year-old son Gideon is enjoying his new brother! She and her family live in Delaware.

Tommy Kalinoski '08 has been in the Coast Guard for the last eight years. He serves as a Boatswain Mate and is in charge of driving boats, weapons and ordnance safety and maintenance, and personnel. He is living on the coast of Maine and has two young children.

Jennifer Cohen reports that **Christian Buck '09** is making amazing video games and drawing brilliant cartoons.

"VCS still feels close to my heart. I often put skills I learned at VCS to work, especially interpersonal and community development. VCS really knows what it means to be a community."
— **Joey Carrara '12**

Tyler LeMay '02 is an Emergency Physician in Rochester, New York. He was nominated for the 2020 *VCS Founders' Alumni Award* for his invaluable professional support to Encounter Weeks, including co-leading the first Back-Country Skiing Encounter Week in 2015. He continues to consult on medical issues for the school.

Naomi Heindel '03 is Director of Field Education at Teton Science Schools in Wyoming, and had her second baby in December.

Matt Brown '05 lives in Connecticut with his wife, dog, and 8-month-old daughter. He's currently the Director of User Experience at Marketade, a small, remote UX research company.

Dan Letovsky '06 works at Booz Allen Hamilton and lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

Ruth Heindel '06 is in her first year as the Dorothy & Thomas Jegla Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at Kenyon College in Ohio. She cut her teeth as a teacher at VCS!

After teaching for the last eight years, **Rosa (Ziegler) Leff '07** is pursuing art full-time. Her papercutting works were featured this summer at Soapbox Arts in Burlington. Rosa's art uses an urban, contemporary, fine art approach that has roots in folk art German scherenschnitte, Mexican papel picado, and traditional Chinese paper cutting. Rosa's husband **Arthur Leff '07** completed his Ph.D. in 2017 in Materials Science and Engineering and is working for the U.S. Army Research Laboratory in Maryland as a transmission electron microscopy scientist.

Will Hayden '09 and **Ruby (Russell) Hayden '09** moved to Minneapolis for Ruby's OB-GYN residency. William works as an assistant brewer at a local microbrewery.

Ian Hollyer '09 graduated from Northwestern University's Medical School in May 2020, and told Peter Goff that he will be continuing his pursuit of science and bacteria.

Carly Lagasse '09 is a nurse at Central Vermont Medical Center.

Joey Carrara '12 is a part-time mountain guide in Colorado, working through the American Mountain Guides Association curriculum toward an international guide certification. Technical climbing is his specialty. Joey is also working on his start-up, The Plastic Pass, a membership that lets climbers climb at any gym in their network.

Adam Coll '12 also lives in Colorado and he and Joey go on adventures together and reminisce about Encounter Weeks and “the good old days” at VCS.

Sarah Mueller '12 is a Ph.D. candidate at the Senckenberg Natural History Museum and Research Institute and Goethe University in Germany, studying how elusive carnivores are recolonizing Europe. Sarah had her first article published on the rise of a large carnivore population in Central Europe in the journal *Conservation Genetics*. Sarah was nominated for the 2020 *Founders' Alumni Award* and we were fortunate to have her share her work with students in Peter Goff's class this October.

Tim Sears '12 lives in New York City and works as a programmer for Google.

Willie Strausser '12 has been living outside of the country since he graduated from VCS. He moved to Osaka in March, just days before Japan put a ban on Americans entering the country. Willie is living with his partner and studying Japanese language full time in preparation for a master's degree in Canada.

Charlotte Rutz '13 graduated from UVM in 2019 with a degree in Eco Agriculture and has worked at a number of local farms. She completed an internship in sustainability at Burton and lives in Burlington with her pet ferret.

Seth Evans-Diffenderfer '14 graduated from Brandeis in 2019 and is now working for a hedge fund.

Spencer Reed '14 worked for the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign.

Miles Lamberson '14 worked as an EMT during his gap year, and graduated from Bates in 2019. He's considering medical school.

Peter Larsen '14 started a Ph.D. in mathematics at UVM.

Emil Koenig '14 majored in economics, lives in New York City, and works for JetBlue on route design.

UVM featured **Jamie Benson '15** as an outstanding 2020 grad. Jamie designed his own major in Healthcare Structure and Emergency Medical Services Research and is an advanced EMT and population health researcher. Early in the pandemic he coordinated PPE distribution for Vermont at the State Emergency Operations Center. He's also building on his research at the Larner College of Medicine on the efficacy, distribution, equity and structure of Vermont's trauma care system.

Nora Hill '15 works at a physical therapy clinic in Vermont and is considering graduate school for physical therapy.

Mikhail Yudien '15 started medical school at the University of Pennsylvania.

Jordan Cannon '16 started her Ph.D. in history at Harvard, with a focus on the Ottoman Empire.

Galen Fastie '16 graduated from Middlebury with a degree in playwriting and political science, and is now considering law school.

Rainer Kannenstein '16 is a comic book illustrator living in Portland, Oregon, and is about to publish his first book.

Anna Leffler '16 graduated from William Smith College and started working toward her Ph.D. in Occupational Therapy at Tufts.

IN MEMORIAM

Jessica Pomerleau-Halton '02

Jessica Pomerleau-Halton died on August 21, 2020, of breast cancer. Peter Goff remembered Jess as one of VCS's earliest students, who acted in Shakespeare plays, came to biology class for dissection dressed impeccably and beautifully, and loved pranks (once sticking her hand in a shark's mouth and waving it around for laughs). After VCS, she earned a BA from UVM and a BFA in computer animation from the Ringling College of Art and Design. Jess returned to Burlington and opened Jess Boutique in 2011 and in 2019 acquired her second boutique, Expressions. She loved her rescue dog and her husband Jameson Halton, whom she married in 2018.

Peter Krag

Former student Peter Krag died in May 2020 at the age of 34. He attended VCS from 1999-2000 and was a talented pianist and composer in the Burlington jazz scene.

BOARD NEWS

*We thank **Dinah Larsen P'14** and **Kyler Robinson '06** who recently completed their Board service. We deeply appreciate their guidance and support during their tenures!*

EDWARD E. FORD FOUNDATION HELPS VCS SUPPORT REFUGEE STUDENTS

In 2017, VCS received a major \$50,000 matching grant from the Edward E. Ford Foundation to provide tuition support for students from refugee families and cover Encounter Week expenses, technology, and supplies needed to succeed at VCS. The grant and donors who stepped up to meet the match are also supporting important DEI and cultural competency training for VCS students and faculty. We partner with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, King Street Center, and the Boys and Girls Club to identify families interested in progressive college prep education at VCS. We're delighted to report that three VCS students have benefited from this support.

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1, 2019 - JUNE 30, 2020

BY THE NUMBERS

108

Students in grades 6-12

276

Alumni

31%

Students who receive financial aid

133

Donors

\$11,641

Average financial aid award

\$61,828

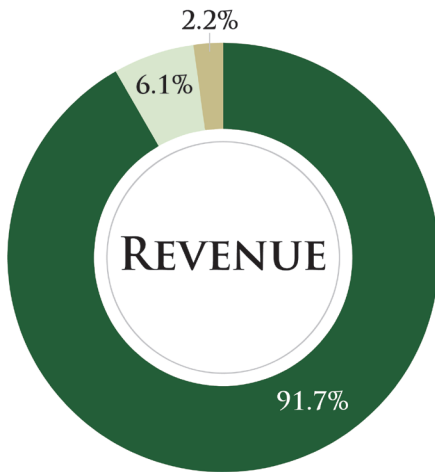
Raised for Emergency Financial Aid

\$372,522

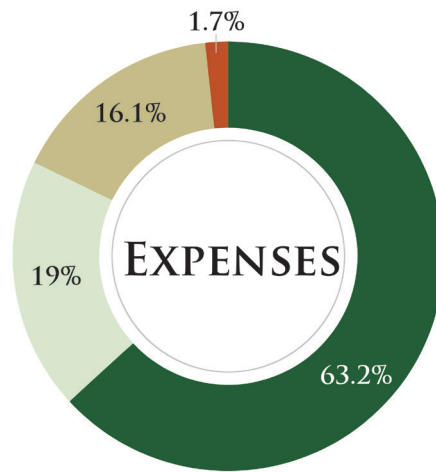
Total financial aid given

\$2.3 MILLION

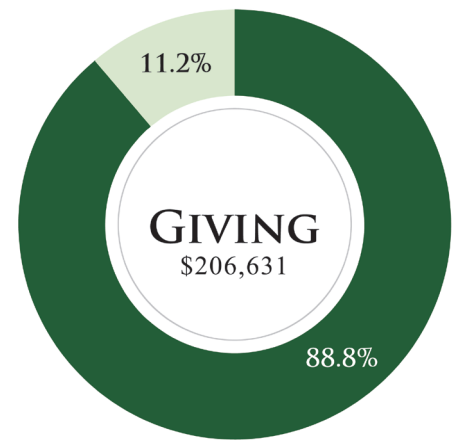
Operating Budget



- Tuition
- Contributions
- Investments, Interest & Other Income



- Salaries & Benefits
- Program & Operating Expenses
- Financial Aid
- Interest Expenses



- Annual Commons Fund & Emergency Financial Aid
- Restricted

PARENT AMBASSADORS

Thank you to our 2019-20 and 2020-21 Parent Ambassadors who volunteer their time in support of VCS!

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Co-Chair

Pauline Tyler P'21, Co-Chair

Susan Ames P'22

Bree Greenberg Benjamin P'23

Andrea Bergstein P'21

Katharine Cohen P'25

Gillian Ehrich P'24 '27

Hollie Foley P'25

Rob Foley P'25

Jennifer Hall P'23

Lindsay Hay P'23 '26

Era MacDonald P'23 '25

Margaret Torizzo P'26

Mario Trabulsy P'20

Joanne Vacarro P'20

Lynn Williams P'27

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING VCS!

We are deeply grateful to donors whose giving to the annual Commons Fund, capital and special projects directly impacts the lives of our students. This list reflects gifts between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, as well as gifts in support of Emergency Financial Aid to support families impacted by the pandemic. Thank you to our community—at all levels, in all roles, and from all eras—for digging deeply last year and every year to ensure VCS students thrive.

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VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

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please email adegn@vermontcommons.org.



The cast and crew of the 2020 Spring Play, *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. The paint on the sets was still wet when students performed the play two weeks early for the entire school community on March 13, 2020, our last day before going remote due to the pandemic.

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