



VERMONT COMMONS AT 25



COMMONS REVIEW

SPRING 2022

MESSAGE FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL
DEXTER MAHAFFEY

WHAT’S YOUR MOMENT?

What I mean by that is, what’s that memory from your time at Vermont Commons that is, above all the others, truly special? As we age, memories of when we were young have to share space with new experiences, new faces, new moments. So it’s always fascinating to think about what stays with us and why. For our current students and recent graduates, it might be harder to pick your most important VCS moment; indeed, your moment may still be waiting for you. For those of you who graduated in the early years of the school, you’ve had more than two decades’ time and space between those powerful, formative experiences and the adult you are now.

Your moment might have been a conversation with Bob, a hike with Leah, studying in the field with Peter, unpacking issues with Mark, or delving into philosophy with Rob or Chance. It might have been learning to write and deconstruct literature with Cara or discovering a passion for Spanish with Jordan. Your moment might not have been an experience with a teacher after all, but with another student, a group of friends, or your core group. Maybe it was in the mountains, out and about in Burlington, New York, Québec, China. Your moment may very well have been solitary, independent, a moment of self-discovery.

Students, teachers, and families have always come to Vermont Commons School for a wide variety of reasons. But regardless of what brought us here, our shared experience for the last 25 years has been one of committed and engaged learning—a series of moments forming the people we’ve become, in some way being responsible for the work we’ve each done in our lives to try to make the world a better place.

So I ask again, what’s your moment? If you could pick just one positive experience that made the most difference in forming who you are and setting you on your path in life, what would it be? We only turn 25 once, and big anniversaries like this are a great time to reflect on such things and reach out to the people who shared that time with you, particularly if they were part of creating that singular moment. We hope that you’ll come back home to VCS for the big 25th celebration and reunion event on June 11th, but even if you can’t, we hope you’ll take this opportunity to reach out to those people who were important to you during your time here and share in the celebration with them, a celebration really of you—who you were, who you’ve become, your legacy and the school’s, one and the same.

Happy 25th Anniversary, Flying Turtles! Happy 25th Anniversary, Vermont Commons School!

Dr. Dexter P. Mahaffey, Head of School



(cover) Acadia Encounter Week,
September 2021

FACULTY & STAFF

Dexter Mahaffey, Ph.D. P’22 ’25, *Head of School*
Kat Ahrens, *Class of ’20 Faculty Chair, Math & Encounter Weeks*
Katherine Bailey, *Registrar & Theater*
Kristen Bellone P’27, *Front Desk Receptionist*
Linda Bursell, *Business Manager*
Frances Cannon, *Art & English*
Chance Cardamone-Knewstub, *Spanish*
Mark Cline Lucey P’23 ’26, *Social Studies*
Jennifer Cohen, *English*
Adriana Comtois P’27, *Spanish*
Matt Davide, *Music*
Amber Degn P’27, *Director of Development*
Jasmine Easter, *Assistant Head of School*

Peter Goff, *Science*
Tim Harger, *Dean of Students*
Ryan Houck, *English*
Mark Keegan, Ph.D. *Class of ’20 Faculty Chair, Science*
Courtney Lamontagne, *Learning Specialist*
Kathryn McDermott, *Social Studies*
Kristofer Mohlman, *Science & Math*
Kat Nelson, *Director of Admissions*
Sharon Panitch P ’22 ’24 ’27, *Development Coordinator*
Eliot Sloan, *College Counselor*
Tonya Waldron, *Math*
Ben Wang, *Chinese & Encounter Weeks*
Amy Williamson, *Counselor*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Kurt Schulz P’22 ’26, *Chair*
Asher Burg ’01
Rebecca Lindy Coll P’12
Andrew Furtsch P’19
Bethany Gibbs P’24, *Vice Chair*
Anne Glosky
Craig Heindel P’03 ’06, *Secretary*
Naomi Heindel ’03
Greg John ’01
Troy KrahI P’21, *Treasurer*
Kathryn McDermott, *Faculty Trustee*
Cathy Townsend P’20 ’22
Rosemary Webb P’16

VCS AT 25: LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE



Liesl Kolbe ’28

TURNING 25 IS AN ACCOMPLISHMENT, but we prefer to think of it as a milestone in a much longer journey—a journey that we invite you to take with us.

Vermont Commons started 25 years ago as a vision, a place where students could focus on high-level

academic skills in an environment that encouraged exploration, critical thought, and global citizenship. That vision is flourishing, thanks to our energetic students, our dedicated faculty, our generous donors, and everyone who has given of themselves to build and grow this place that we love.

And we know that we are not done building, and we are not done growing.

We will think of new ways to encourage stewardship of our world.

We will craft new **adventures**, **explore** new ideas, **create** new works of art, welcome new students into our **buildings**, and give them **the tools to go anywhere**.

Join us as we imagine the possibilities for the next 25 years.

OUR EXPANDING CAMPUS

75 GREEN MOUNTAIN DRIVE

- Built 1975
- Originally occupied by Aquatec
- 27,500 sq. ft.
- On 1.4 acres, largely paved

55 GREEN MOUNTAIN DRIVE

- Built 1978
- Built for Karhu Skis
- 16,700 sq. ft.
- On 2.8 acres, mostly wooded

OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER, CHARLOTTE

- 55 acres of woods, fields, and wetlands



75 Green Mountain Drive



55 Green Mountain Drive

55 GMD PHASE I:

- Permitting and site work, including pavement striping, crosswalks, bicycle racks, and signage
- Safety upgrades to electrical panels, sensors, and alarms
- Creation of gym, including flooring, lighting, wall padding, window upgrades, and equipment
- Changing rooms

PHASE II POSSIBILITIES:

- Art studios and darkroom
- Music studios
- Dedicated STEM space
- Library and gallery
- Additional classrooms
- Quiet study and tutoring spaces
- Faculty and student lounges
- Storage
- Faculty offices

Expansion phases dependent on fundraising



24TH COMMENCEMENT | FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2021

VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL’S 24TH COMMENCEMENT took place outdoors on Friday, June 11 on the picturesque land of Kurt Schulz and Marielle Goossens P’22 ’26. Faculty members Ben Wang and Matt Davide led the processional on violin and saxophone. Jordan Holmes was the class speaker, and graduating seniors Benjamin Poulin, Candace Hosmer, and Austin Mital-Skiff gave musical performances. Congratulations, VCS Class of 2021!

Members of the Vermont Commons School Class of 2021

Maya Akazawa
Rachel Bergstein*
Sofia Bitukendja
Sophie Dodds
Ethan Geiger
Jordan Holmes

Candace Hosmer
Catherine Krahll
Sophie Lee
Austin Mital-Skiff*
Morgan Poquette
Benjamin Poulin*

Clara Retzlöff
Izzy Stearns
Andrew Stern
Riley Tyler**
Ireland Young

*Naturalist Diploma Certificate, **Fine Arts Diploma Certificate
Multi-year Diploma Certificates are VCS’s highest academic accomplishment and honor.

WHERE IS THE CLASS OF ’21 NOW?

Collectively, the members of the Class of 2021 received acceptances to 67 colleges and universities, and were offered more than \$4.5 million in scholarship and merit awards. They are continuing their studies at:

Bard College
Case Western Reserve University
Clark University
Columbia University
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Middlebury College
Mount Holyoke College
Northeastern University
Oberlin College
Skidmore College
Smith College

St. Mary’s College of Maryland
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Massachusetts Boston (2)
University of Michigan
University of Vermont

CLASS OF ’21 SENIOR GIFT SUPPORTS DEI SCHOLARSHIP

THE FAMILIES OF THE CLASS OF ’21 joined forces to make an important investment in our community by creating the **Class of ’21 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Scholarship Fund**. Senior families wanted to support the advancement of DEI at Vermont Commons, and the fund has allowed us to build upon the work we started in 2017 with a matching grant from The Edward E. Ford Foundation in support of scholarships for refugee students.

Senior class gifts are always welcomed. We are grateful to all who have supported the Class of ’21 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Scholarship Fund, with donations totaling nearly \$16,000.

You can still contribute to the health and growth of this effort by making a gift at vermontcommons.org/giving. Note that your donation is for the Class of ’21 DEI Fund.

ENCOUNTER WEEK SPOTLIGHT

VCS EXPLORES MIGRANT ISSUES IN THE SONORAN BORDERLANDS

“TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH THE WORLD” is a lofty aspiration, and one that could easily turn to empty words without the commitment of time, energy, and passion that its fulfillment demands.

In early March, faculty members Kathryn McDermott and Chance Cardamone-Knewstubb and student leader Zoe Hecht ’22 led a group of 13 VCS students on an unforgettable Encounter Week to the US-Mexico border in Arizona. There, they engaged deeply with migrants, asylum-seekers, and the people who provide support to them as they navigate a dangerous—and sometimes deadly—journey. It was an investment of time, energy, and passion that resulted in a trip, “so deeply impactful, that I would like to see it become a staple of the VCS experience,” according to one participating student.

After more than fifteen hours of travel and a few minor glitches, the group arrived well after sundown at a campground in the Santa Catalina mountains outside of Tucson. The next morning, they awoke to the breathtaking scenery of the Desert Southwest. With little time to explore their surroundings, they piled back into vans and drove to the border wall.



Hiking in the Santa Catalinas



Visiting a memorial marking the location of a migrant death

“The border is often described as a scar in the landscape. I don’t think it is yet a scar, but a continually agitated wound. Every time a migrant dies quietly and anonymously under mesquite brush, the border bleeds.”

-Zoe Hecht ’22

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VCS students at the border wall

Over the next several days, they met and worked with organizations that aid migrants in unimaginably difficult situations. Tucson Samaritans, a humanitarian aid group that assists migrants in distress in the Sonoran desert, stocks remote stations with food, water, and medical supplies. These stations are sometimes the only thing between people and death. Our students learned that the water stations are often targeted and destroyed by militia members or vigilantes, and that hundreds of people die in the desert every year on their way to seeking shelter and safety in the U.S.

Casa Alitas, also based in Tucson, provides assistance to asylum-seekers released from ICE and Border Patrol detention into the community. Volunteers offer support by providing hospitality, including housing, food, clothing, toiletries, advocacy, and travel assistance. VCS students changed linens, tended the Casa Alitas garden, played with the younger guests, and assisted a man who was severely injured when he leapt from the border wall.

“I really enjoyed working at Casa Alitas, especially with the younger kids. They were bored, feeling out of place, and lonely. I enjoyed hanging out with them and speaking Spanish with them. I remember meeting a man named Israel from Cuba. He had to leave his kids and had lost a young son. Chance and I spoke with him right as he arrived at Casa Alitas. It was really emotional and sad, but really good to see that he had made it there.”

-Charlie Melamede '23

There was also some time to explore the beauty of the Santa Catalina mountains; before leaving, the group enjoyed a day of hiking and swimming in a waterfall, which provided a much-needed opportunity to process some of what they had seen and experienced.



Aidan Hall '23 at Casa Alitas

“We talked a lot about our presence as a privileged school group that spent tens of thousands of dollars on a trip. Would it have been more beneficial to donate the amount of money it took to run the trip? But everywhere we went, we were told that it is important to go back to where we came from with the stories and relationships—that this was a vital component of the work we were doing. Now we will all carry this lived experience, this landscape, these moments of grief with us into our lives and jobs, and it will help to inform every choice we make forever.”

-Zoe Hecht '22

The group returned to Vermont exhausted and deeply impacted by the trip, which was, in varying measures, inspiring, heartbreaking, and extraordinarily beautiful. About a month later, the Borderlands Encounter Week took front and center at an all-school Common Hour, where the travelers shared what they learned, and more significantly, what it is like to bear witness to the lives of people in the most extreme of circumstances.

“This trip has grown to have its own force, with a life that keeps on going far past our return to BTV late that night in early March. I’m not sure if it’s that we don’t want to let go of it, or it won’t let go of us, but here we are months later, still feeling its power driving us in ways big and small almost every day.”

-Faculty member
Kathryn McDermott



Charlotte Dodds '23 in Arizona

STUDENT NEWS | OUR TURTLES FLY!

Simon Rosenbaum '22 was named a **National Merit Finalist**. Additionally, Simon earned 3rd place in Senator Bernie Sanders' **State of the Union Essay Contest** and was named **Best Delegate** at the St. Johnsbury Model UN Conference. Most recently Simon organized and served as Secretary-General of the VCS-hosted Model UN conference, which welcomed delegates from schools in Vermont and New York.

Zoe Hecht '22, Jordan Townsend '22, Finn Verdonk '22, Charlotte Dodds '23, and Eden Smith '23 attended the NAIS Online **Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC)** in early December. The SDLC is a multiracial, multicultural gathering of high school student leaders from across the U.S. and abroad. In addition to attending larger workshops with 5,000+ students, VCS students attended a series of smaller workshops organized by region and affinity.

Iris Lawson-Ryan '22, Anjay Mital-Skiff '23, and Magnus Ames '22 were selected for the **Vermont Youth Volleyball Association All-Vermont Team** for 2021. A committee of coaches from across the state created the All-Vermont team from a roster of nearly 500 varsity players. Magnus and Iris also represented Vermont in Senior Showcase matches against New Hampshire and Maine.



Thirteen intrepid Vermont Commons delegates boarded a bus at 4 a.m. this past February to attend the **Boston Model United Nations Conference**. Representing VCS were **Simon Rosenbaum '22, Jordan Townsend '22, Henry Black '23, Emmett Cline Lucey '23, Tyler Loiselle '23, Anjay Mital-Skiff '23, Carley Roberts '23, Jack Foley '25, Skylar Knoop '25, Sam LaMonde '25, Elizabeth Poulin '25, Tim Pricer '25, and Winslow Solomon '25.**

A mere week after playing the lead in the VCS Players' show *Harvey*, **Finn Verdonk '22** culminated six years of dancing with **Vermont Youth Dancers** by showcasing his talent as the Cowardly Lion in the VYD's production of *Far From Home: In Search of the Emerald City*.

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Amelia Foster '25 traveled to the Barre Opera House in March to compete in the **Vermont Arts Council's Poetry Out Loud** competition. Vermont high schoolers who win their school competitions are invited to the statewide event each year.



Fiona McCormick '27 gave a high-energy, hilarious performance as Lavender in **The Lyric Theater's** production of *Matilda: The Musical*. This was the theater veteran's third show with Lyric.

Talia Gibbs '24, received an honorable mention in the **Scholastic Art & Writing Awards**, a prestigious national program, for her essay about the "pink tax." Talia was also a 2021 winner of the Vermont Arts Council's Poetry Out Loud competition.

The VCS Players returned to the stage this year with the classic, *Harvey*, by Mary Chase. Seniors Tess Foley-Cox '22, Zoe Hecht '22, and Finn Verdonk '22 gave memorable farewell performances in this madcap comedy directed by Katherine Bailey and Ryan Houck.



VCS students demonstrated their commitment to the greater community by raising funds for a number of worthy causes. During a March snowstorm, eight VCS students participated in the **Penguin Plunge**, raising \$3,250 for the Special Olympics. On a slightly less frigid night, a team of 12 students and three teachers participated in the **Spectrum Sleep Out**, a fundraiser for Spectrum Youth and Family Services, raising a total of \$4,689 for Spectrum's programs.



Students and teachers post-Penguin Plunge



At the Sleep Out with Spectrum Executive Director Mark Redmond (far left)

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

JORDAN TOWNSEND '22 KEEPS HER COOL DURING SENIOR INTERNSHIP



LIKE MANY 7TH GRADERS first arriving at VCS, Jordan Townsend '22 had no clue what was in store for her over the next six years—and looking back now, she's not sure knowing would have calmed her

nerves. "When you're that young, everything surprises you... I would have been like, 'Really? That seems scary!'"

As a student who experienced the majority of high school in the shadow of a pandemic, Jordan has certainly had more than her fair share of surprises, though she insists that in the end, none was cause for apprehension. The ones that stick out to her as graduation peeks around the corner bear gentler memories, such as her freshman winter Encounter Week, spent at Wheeler Pond with a group of students both younger and older than she. "We were right by the lake, and it was all iced over... There was a dance party in the cabin, but I played football outside with some other kids. And that was just such a heartwarming, fun moment. We all laughed, we all tackled each other. Every time I think of Encounter Week, that's the first trip that pops into my mind."

It was these close relationships with fellow students and faculty that helped see Jordan through some of the more intense moments of the last few years. Finding her place at VCS has allowed her to feel comfortable stretching her wings and taking opportunities outside the classroom. When she learned that seniors could replace an elective with an internship, Jordan decided to explore her interest in veterinary medicine. "I wanted to do something with animals. I reached out to Kurt Schulz P'22 '26 at Peak Veterinary Referral Center, and he was very kind about letting me help."

Jordan's senior internship hours happened to fall on Dr. Schulz's surgery days. At first, her time was spent helping with routine administrative tasks or observing Dr. Schulz and the other vets. Then one day, completely out of the blue, Jordan received an unexpected challenge: an offer to participate in an operation. "That day, Kurt suddenly said, 'Do you want to scrub in?' And I said, 'Yeah! Totally!'" The procedure turned out to be a complicated reconstruction of a dog's broken hind leg. Far from shying away from an experience that might once have seemed "scary," Jordan was all in. "Kurt put in a metal plate to stabilize the leg, and I got to use the drill! It was very nerve-wracking because I did not want to mess up, but I did it and it was really cool."

Though the internship ultimately helped her realize that veterinary medicine isn't her true calling, Jordan is grateful to have had the opportunity to explore the field in depth, and is as appreciative as ever of her relationship with animals. "I always want them in my life. I'd like a couple of dogs, and," added the avid equestrian, "a horse here and there."

Jordan is bound for Skidmore College following VCS, where she is planning to major in either psychology or social work with a minor in business, and hopes to one day meld her love of animals with child psychology. "I've thought about how to tie in being a therapist and being with animals. Animals are very therapeutic; I'd love to incorporate them in my work."



Jordan astride Fahrenheit with riding instructor and VCS alum Lilly Joseph '01

When asked what advice she would give new 6th and 7th graders just arriving at VCS, Jordan recommends that they turn to their older peers if they feel overwhelmed or nervous about what lies ahead. Perhaps she was recalling that winter Encounter Week, having an unexpected game of football in the snow, when she sagely remarked, "You'll find your way around, but don't be afraid to make friends with the upperclassmen. We really do want to help. And just enjoy your time!" 🌱

FACULTY NEWS

English Department Chair **Ryan Houck** completed a three-day course with the American Mountain Guide Association and passed a rigorous, two-day exam to become a Single Pitch Climbing Instructor. The course and exam covered setting up ropes, building anchors, managing group sites, conducting rescues, managing risk, and teaching belaying techniques. Ryan is using his newly certified skills and passion for climbing to lead a spring climbing Encounter Week with alum **Joey Carrara '12**.



Ryan Houck

Science Department Chair **Peter Goff** is one of six high school teachers in Vermont to take part in the INSPIRES program, a multi-state, NSF-funded project researching the Northern Forest Region. Researchers are installing advanced sensors at VCS's Outdoor Education Center in Charlotte, and students will learn how to gather and interpret data to contribute to a larger archive on the Northern Forests. Over the course of this three-year initiative, Peter will convene with educators from Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine for one week each summer to build a curriculum that supports students' quantitative reasoning skills in the context of forestry.



Peter Goff at the Outdoor Education Center

YOU SAY GOODBYE, WE SAY HELLO

We have bid farewell to a number of beloved faculty members this year. Director of Admissions **Jill Strawbridge P'20** has moved on to new adventures. We will miss her irrepressible enthusiasm! We also said goodbye to the multi-talented **Steve Lausier**, VCS's Registrar, IT wizard, and play director. **Marta Beede** and **Susan Wertheimer** have stepped down as college counselors to focus on their private practices. We are grateful to Jill, Steve, Marta, and Susan for everything they brought to our community.

We have also welcomed several new faculty and staff members who are already bringing their own magic to their work at VCS: **Kat Nelson**, Director of Admissions; **Kristen Bellone P'27**, Front Desk Receptionist; **Eliot Sloan**, College Counselor; and **Sharon Panitch P'22, '24, '27**, Development Coordinator.



Jennifer Cohen

English instructor **Jennifer Cohen** was invited to lead a session of the Kenyon Review Summer Workshops for Teachers. Two years ago, Jennifer attended the Workshops, a six-day intensive that combines the creative spirit of the Kenyon Review Writers Workshops with an element of professional development that focuses on classroom practices. This coming summer, she will return to the program as a workshop leader.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

THERE AND BACK AGAIN ADRIANA COMTOIS AND THE PERÚ CONNECTION

IF YOU ASK ADRIANA COMTOIS, Spanish teacher and World Languages Department Chair, what brought her to Vermont Commons, she'll sum it up with one word: fate.

Adriana had been in Vermont for a little more than two years—first as an undergraduate seeking to hone her English-speaking skills, then as a student at Saint Michael's College pursuing her first Master's degree—when she married her husband, Michael. The newlyweds were immediately faced with the question of where they would set down roots. At the time, Adriana hoped to return to her native Perú, largely because she found Vermont to be too cold.

Before committing to such a move, Michael asked Adriana to go for at least one job in Vermont. Adriana agreed, and fate entered, stage right. "I opened the newspaper the first time, and I saw this ad that said, 'We're looking for a Spanish teacher.' So I called. I had a really good conversation with Rob [Skiff] about politics...not about Republicans or Democrats, but about how I see politics impacting Latin America. It was very different from any other job interview I'd had," Adriana says.

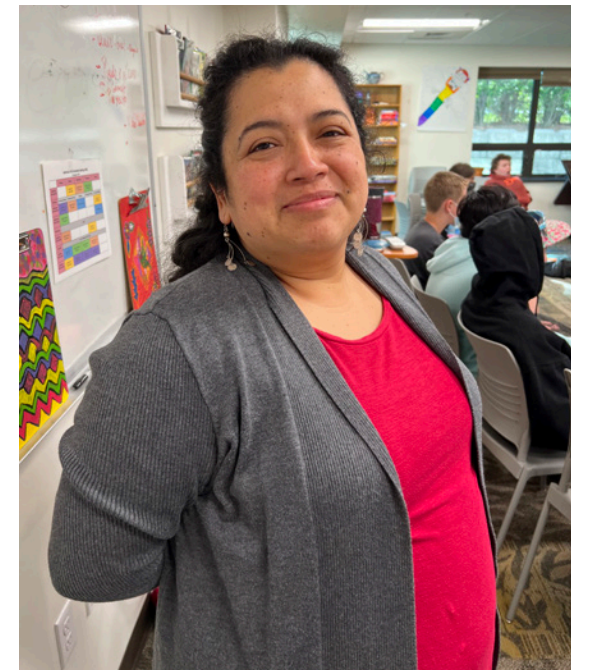
Now celebrating her 17th year at the school, Adriana stands firmly in the ranks of the faculty's old guard. During her tenure she's worn many hats—working in development, creating the VCS yearbook, and serving as the Faculty Trustee on the Board of Trustees.

Where Adriana's vision and persistence has had the deepest impact, however, is in VCS's successful sister school relationship with Colegio Santa Ana in Lima, Perú.

"I felt that I couldn't call myself a real Spanish teacher if I couldn't connect my students with real experiences. It's one thing to teach them grammar, vocabulary, and how to read the news. It's another thing to really understand other people's beliefs, and see things from other perspectives."

Even with Adriana's determination, getting the program to stand on its own didn't happen overnight. Before connecting with Colegio Santa Ana, Adriana came close to establishing relationships with three different schools, each of which ended up not working out. "It was like a rock in my shoe for the longest time. I tried many times to get it going, but the main problem was connecting with a school that seemed serious about making it happen."

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Our expectations were never low. We aspired to innovate, to do great things, to have a strong college prep curriculum, to help young people be global citizens.

-Dr. Robert Skiff, Sr., Founder and First Head of School

25 YEARS OF VCS

VCS FOUNDED BY BOB SKIFF, LEAH MITAL, AND ROB SKIFF

I remember interviewing our first student, Mary Cotton, on my parents' front porch.
-Rob Skiff



VCS girls win first of four State Volleyball Championships



First Ultimate Frisbee season



VCS receives NEASC accreditation

First Model UN delegation travels to Dartmouth conference

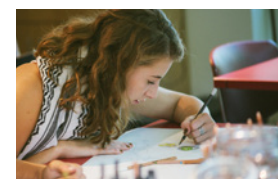
GLOWing (Gay, Lesbian, or Whatever) Turtles alliance launches

VCS adds a media lab so that Mark Cline Lucey has a place to live!

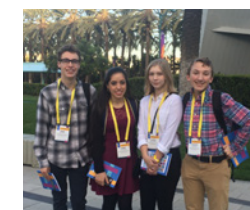


VCS receives Edward E. Ford Foundation grant to aid students with refugee status

VCS GROWS!
Campaign for Arts and Sciences supports new classrooms and arts wing.



VCS students attend Student Diversity Leadership Conference



VCS MOVES OUTDOORS!

VCS buys 55 acres in Charlotte to create Outdoor Education Center



FIRST ENCOUNTER WEEK

On our first E-Week, we were not prepared for a major snowfall. I vividly recall Leah thawing out one student's feet on her stomach.
-Peter Goff

1997 1998 1999 2004 2006 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2014 2015 2016 2017 2019 2020 2021 2022

PETER GOFF AND LEAH MITAL REGISTER VCS TO PLAY REC VOLLEYBALL

When "The Turtles" is dismissed by town clerk, Leah suggests "The Flying Turtles."



VCS Players stage their first production:
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Flying Turtles reign as state Ultimate champions!



The 9th Grade Bike Trip becomes a VCS rite of passage



Bear eats nearly entire cache of food for E-Week trip to Adirondacks. Students ration cucumbers to survive.



VCS PURCHASES 75 GREEN MOUNTAIN DRIVE

Reports of a pool in the basement are greatly exaggerated.



FIRST 6TH GRADE CLASS STARTS

Unaware that they are the smallest people in the building, they make an outsized impact.



VCS HAS A NEW SISTER SCHOOL!

First Colegio Santa Ana (Perú) students visit Vermont.



VCS CELEBRATES 25 YEARS!



VCS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Purchase of 55 Green Mountain Drive. Visioning and Phase I begin.

"THE MAZE" IS RENOVATED

Rescue parties to search for students lost on the 2nd floor are no longer needed.



Adriana at Colegio Santa Ana

Colegio Santa Ana, she swore, would be her last attempt. Fortunately, fate stepped in again, CSA came on board, and the first cohort of Peruvian students arrived at VCS in November 2016. “The first year was a lot of trial and error. There were so many questions that nobody knew the answers to, but it was very successful! The second year we really saw that it was good, and the third year Dexter said we needed to make this official, so that we know that no matter what, we’ll always be in contact.” It was then, in 2018, that Head of School Dexter Mahaffey traveled to Lima to create a memorandum of understanding that solidified the sister school relationship.

Over three years, Colegio Santa Ana sent three different groups of students to VCS, and two groups of VCS students made the journey to Lima. In a

faculty exchange, VCS teachers Jennifer Cohen and Tonya Waldron were able to spend time teaching at CSA and two CSA instructors came to teach at VCS. A third group of VCS students was slated to leave for Perú when Covid hit. By then, the program had become wildly popular with students. “We learned that the kids are very willing to be flexible, and it’s been very positive. We’re trying to revive it now that we’re back [in person], and Colegio Santa Ana just allowed students back. Hopefully next year they can visit and we can go back to Lima.”

Not one to sit idle, Adriana has been working toward a second Master’s degree—this one an M.Ed. with a focus on curriculum instruction—through the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in Lima. She will defend her thesis this spring, and while her hope is to continue on to a Ph.D., the uncertainties of Covid have complicated the journey.

As for the first and only job she applied to in Vermont? “It was love at first sight. I would have loved to have been a student here.”

While that may not be feasible, Adriana is making sure that the next generation of Comtoises get the chance; her older son, Lucas, is a member of the Vermont Commons Class of 2027. 🌱

COVID STRANDS ADRIANA
A HEMISPHERE AWAY

All of us have vivid memories of where we were when the world shut down in March 2020. Adriana was in the midst of her sabbatical, teaching English at Colegio Santa Ana and “reconnecting with my roots.” When the country announced it was stopping all incoming and outgoing commercial flights for at least two weeks, Adriana sat tight with her mom in Lima while Michael and her boys, Dominic and Lucas ’27, were safe in Vermont. As the weeks stretched on with no travel plans in sight, she contacted Sen. Leahy’s office; staffers there got her onto a plane with little notice. Leaving nearly all of her luggage behind, she boarded a flight from Lima to Washington and reunited with her husband, sons, and VCS family in April.

CLASS OF ’20
FACULTY CHAIR
AWARD
KAT AHRENS
AND MARK
KEEGAN

THE 2021 CLASS OF ’20 FACULTY CHAIR AWARD went jointly to two outstanding VCS faculty members: Kat Ahrens (math) and Mark Keegan (science). Kat and Mark both ask a lot of their students, and they support and inspire them every step of the way. They lead and teach with a generosity of spirit and a true love for their subjects that comes through every day.

CONGRATULATIONS,
KAT AND MARK!



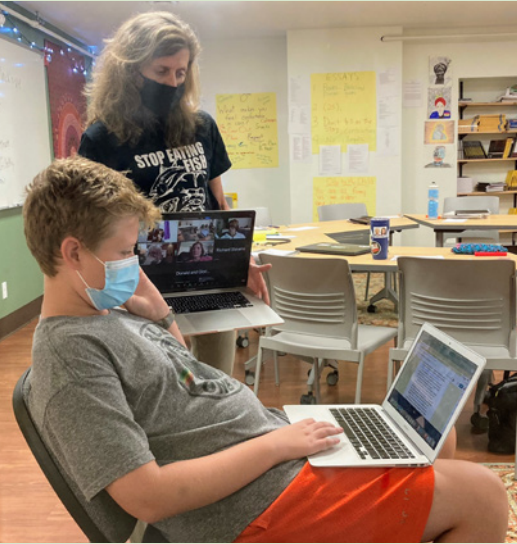
The Class of ’20 Faculty Chair Award recognizes faculty members whose excellence inspires and embodies a love of learning and commitment to community. You can contribute to the growth of the fund that supports this award by making a gift at vermontcommons.org/giving. Note that your donation is for the Class of ’20 Faculty Chair Award Fund.



HYBRID AND HIGH ENERGY:
GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDFRIENDS DAY



NEARLY 60 GUESTS joined us for a hybrid **Grandparents and Grand Friends Day** on October 15. While our students attended school in-person, we welcomed guests virtually from around the country and overseas. Grands and friends experienced a day in the life of their students as they gathered for Morning Meeting, shared their writing in English, conducted experiments in science, and conversed with Adriana in Spanish. Although we can’t wait to welcome our Grands back in person, the benefit of going virtual is that we can share VCS with all of our loved ones, no matter where they are!



Oscar Lucey ’27 reads his writing to Grands on Zoom

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MORRIGAN MCCARTHY '01
RECEIVES FOUNDERS' ALUMNI
AWARD



EACH YEAR OUR ALUMNI COMMUNITY AND FACULTY NOMINATE an alum who embodies the Vermont Commons mission of Scholarship, Community, and Global Responsibility to receive the **Founders' Alumni Award**. In 2021, we were delighted to award this honor to **Morrigan McCarthy, Class of 2001**.

Morrigan's passion for photography began early; in 8th grade, she received an SLR camera which she used to take pictures throughout her years at VCS. Morrigan was one of the very first students enrolled, starting as a freshman in 1997. By her own admission she was strong-willed and independent, and when the faculty showed confidence in their students as critical thinkers and capable problem-solvers, she proved that confidence to be well placed.

After VCS, Morrigan went on to study poetry at Connecticut College and photography at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies. In 2011, Morrigan's adventurous spirit led her and fellow photographer Alan Winslow on a round-the-world tour, traveling by bicycle from Alaska to Argentina and through Morocco and Europe, then by Honda Element-turned-car-camper through the U.S. During their travels, they photographed and interviewed Millennials for a project called *The Geography of Youth*, which premiered in 2014 as an interactive public art show in New York.

In 2015, she became a Politics Photo Editor at *The New York Times* just in time for the 2016 presidential campaign, coordinating election-related photography and live visual coverage. The following year, she became a National Photo Editor, developing visual storytelling plans across all of *The Times's* platforms. She pioneered the use of the photo scroll, now a staple of the newspaper's online presence.

In her current role at *The New York Times*, Morrigan

gets to dream up new ways to share visuals with *Times* readers while working with the newsroom and with product designers to create new tools. Her work has garnered numerous awards, including the 2019 *Pictures of the Year International Newspaper* Visual Editor of the Year Award of Excellence.

The same spirit that allowed Morrigan to thrive at a brand-new school in 1997 has served her well in the years since. Her skills, vision, and leadership continue to change the way we see the world, and we are proud to call her an alum. Congratulations, Morrigan!

VCS IN HER OWN WORDS
EXCERPTED FROM MORRIGAN'S
ACCEPTANCE REMARKS

When I was in high school, it absolutely never crossed my mind that I could be a journalist. I was a freshman at VCS the first year it opened, which was 1997. This was an objectively crazy leap for my parents to take, but I'm deeply grateful that they did because from day one Pete and the other teachers treated us like, if perhaps not quite adults, then like people who were capable. Their confidence in us fostered our own confidence in ourselves and it was at VCS that I really honed the important journalistic art of figuring it out.

"I can draw a straight line from VCS and teachers like Pete to my job now."

I remember one year I told Pete that I wanted to dissect a jellyfish, thinking there was no way he'd say yes. I mean, how would you do that? And he didn't even blink. He just ordered me the jellyfish and let me go to town. It was messy for sure, but he let me just figure it out.

*Beyond the knowledge, beyond the stuff that we studied in high school, it was those kinds of life lessons that I took from VCS. The idea that if I didn't know something, I could do research. I could ask around. I could try things without being scared to fail. I can draw a straight line from VCS and teachers like Pete to my job now where I'm often the loudest voice in the room encouraging people at *The New York Times* to try something new. Take a chance. Figure it out. Those skills have served me really well over the years and I have VCS to thank for that. 🐼*

ALUMNI NEWS

Calling all VCS alums!
Do you want to get back in touch with your classmates? Do you enjoy being a social connector? Do you want to maintain or strengthen your connection to VCS? Talk to us about being a Class Representative.

Contact Amber at
adeqn@vermontcommons.org or call/text
802-923-6286 for more information.

NHS members **Rachel Bergstein '21** and **Tess Foley-Cox '22** organized our successful spring 2021 **Alumni College Panel** and Tess did it again in January 2022, giving juniors and seniors an opportunity to connect with alums. Participating alums included: **Rachel Bergstein '21, Graham Byers '18, Ella Dunkiel '20, Seth Fisher-Olvera '20, Matt Furtsch '19, Sama Mahdi '20, Austin Mital-Skiff '21, Mari Rosenbluth '19, Tess Ruddy '20, Amira Silverman '17, and Reeves Strawbridge '20.**



(L to R) Zoe Hecht '22, Jennifer Cohen, Amira Silverman '17

Ben Synder '99 was spotted at a VCS volleyball practice last fall! Great to see you, Ben!

Jonathan Mann '00 is living in Connecticut where he still composes daily. He started writing songs for VCS Morning Meeting, and has written a song a day since 2008. He is currently the *Guinness Book of World Records* record

holder for "Most Consecutive Days Writing Songs."

VCS welcomed **Asher Burg '01** and **Greg John '01** to the Board of Trustees! See our Board news for the latest updates from Asher and Greg.

Morrigan McCarthy '01, recipient of the 2021 VCS Founders' Alumni Award, is an award-winning editor at *The New York Times*.

Eamon McMahon '01 is part of Sciences Technical Support Services at Middlebury College, where he works as a Scientific Machinist.

Dan Shearer '01 found his true passion in emergency medicine about 11 years ago. Since then, he went back to school to become an emergency department RN. He is married and lives in South Burlington with his wife, son, and dogs.

Matt Brown '05 is a Lead Product User Experience Researcher at UserZoom in New Haven, CT.

Nate Higbie '05 is living in Washington, DC, and serving as a Senior Manager on Amazon's DC-based Public Policy team.

Aislinn Wallace '05 works at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where she provides grant writing support and consultation for NIH biomedical research grants. She is also a part-time student in UPenn Law School's master's program and happily noted that she was married in December, 2020.

Dan Letovsky '06 lives in Washington, DC, where he teaches ethics. He taught remotely at Norwich University last fall.

Eli Jager '09 attended the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, MD, as an Interactive Media & Interdisciplinary Sculpture double major for three years before transferring to complete a BA in Fine Furniture Design & Construction. Since then, Eli has worked as a glass blower, a carpenter, an industrial designer, and most recently, a brand strategist and writer at Solidarity of Unbridled Labour in Burlington.

Alex Mason '09 lives in Austin, TX, and works as a planner for large events.

Allie (Reed) Begnoche '10 spent a number of years operating a farm in Vermont after earning a degree in public health. She is currently working towards her teaching license and is hoping to teach science.

Elena Mudd '10 is a Brooklyn-based portrait and freelance photographer. Her work has appeared in *Elle*, *InStyle*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*, among others.

Shana Wolfstein '11 recently had a baby boy and is living in New York.

Joey Carrara '12 is a full-time mountain guide in Boulder, CO, specializing in technical climbing. This spring he is co-leading a climbing E-Week with faculty member Ryan Houck.

Elsa Hollyer '12 is living in Southern California studying video

game animation and virtual reality technology after having earned a BA in Sociology from Pacific University. She currently works as a freelance artist for an educational mobile game.

Mia Jager '13 is back in Vermont after a stint in New York City! Mia is working as a kitchen designer at Bouchard-Pierce, and hopes to be at the 25th anniversary celebration and reunion in June.

Gabriel Mantegna '13 has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 2018. He works as a Senior Consultant at Energy and Environmental Economics, Inc., where he helps utility companies address the challenges of moving to renewable energy.

Seth Evans-Diffenderfer '14 recently started a new job in investment banking, primarily providing merger and acquisition advisory services in the consumer and retail sector. He enjoys practicing Chinese with his wife, Erica.



Seth Evans-Diffenderfer '14 and his wife, Erica Ma

Emil Koenig '14 lives in New York City and works for JetBlue doing route planning.

Mitch Leffler '14 has spent many years living in Bratislava, Slovakia,

where he frequently performs stand-up comedy in English, Czech, and Slovak, when he's not teaching or tending to his newly-opened bar.

Spencer Reed '14 is working at Renew US to help elect Progressives to state legislatures and pass Green New Deal legislation at the state level. He lives in Providence, RI, with his two cats.

Mikhal Yudien '15 is loving medical school at the University of Pennsylvania.

Anna Leffler '16 is in her second year at Tufts University in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program.

Ceile Kronick '17 is a film major at Carleton College, where he surrounds himself with music by working in the concert hall and recording groups that play on campus. He also finds time to play his violin.

Amira Silverman '17 was in town for the Alumni College Panel last September and took the opportunity to cheer on her beloved VCS volleyball team! Amira is a research assistant at Brown University in the medical school and hospital, working on harm reduction around youth and intentional firearm injury.

Graham Byers '18 is a senior at the University of Southern California majoring in film production and minoring in entrepreneurship. He has been developing a nonprofit venture, The Green Film Standard, which works to curb Hollywood blockbuster production emissions. He also works for Universal Music Group as a visual content creator

and freelances as a director of photography.

Jalen Gibbs '18 is living in Arkansas and is completing his dual degree in Biology and Environmental Science at Duke University.

Nick Mantegna '18 credits VCS and Mark Cline Lucey with sparking his interest in mapping and forestry, and is working for a natural resources consulting firm on Vancouver Island, BC.

We were thrilled to have **Caleb Morehouse '19** back at VCS for a stint coaching middle school basketball this past winter!



Caleb Morehouse '19 with the VCS middle school team

Sama Mahdi '20 works for American Airlines and was involved in discussions about an expansion at the Burlington airport. She is a student at UVM and is also doing research in pulmonology.

Catherine Krahl '21 and **Ethan Geiger '21** stopped by VCS last December for a visit. Catherine reported that things are going well for her at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.



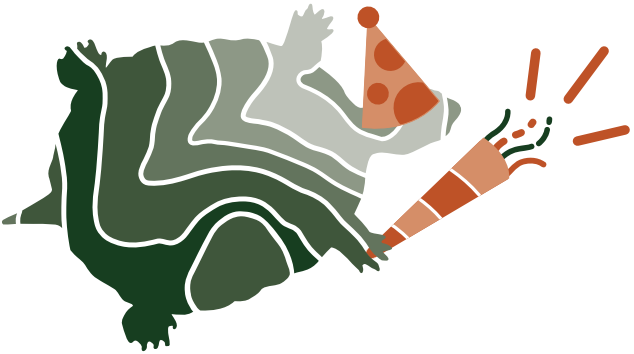
(L to R) Ethan Popick '22, Ethan Geiger '21, Catherine Krahl '21



Twenty four alums joined us for the Alumni-Faculty Meetup on May 20, 2021.

JOIN US FOR OUR 25TH CELEBRATION AND ALL-CLASS REUNION ON JUNE 11TH!

Details at vermontcommons.org/25th.



BOARD NEWS

We are grateful to **Pauline Tyler P'21** and **Corey Wheatley-Starbuck**, who recently completed their service on the VCS Board. We are deeply appreciative of their support, and thank them for generously giving their time and energy to Vermont Commons.

We are excited to welcome **Asher Burns-Burg '01** and **Greg John '01** as our newest board members! Asher is a commercial leader who has grown and scaled mission-driven, publicly-traded, and venture-backed businesses for more than 15 years. He is currently Vice President of Sales at GiveGampus.

We loved seeing so many alums, from the earliest to the most recent, at our virtual **Alumni-Faculty Meetup** last May. The Class of 2001 even had an impromptu 20-year reunion! Among the attendees were **Asher Burg '01, Greg John '01, Morrigan McCarthy '01, Eamon McMahon '01, Dan Shearer '01, Matt Brown '05, Aislinn Wallace '05, Dan Letovsky '06, Tommy Kalinoski '08, Elena Mudd '10, Teddy Retzlaff '11, Gabe Mantegna '13, Seth Evans-Diffenderfer '14, Emil Koenig '14, Peter Larsen '14, Mitch Leffler '14, Spencer Reed '14, Jamie Benson '15, Eli Hinds '16, Anna Leffler '16, Ceile Kronick '17, Graham Byers '18, Jalen Gibbs '18, and Sama Mahdi '20.**

Tell us where you are and what you're up to!
Send updates to adeqn@vermontcommons.org or call/text 802-923-6286

MEMORIAL GARDEN

AT THE 25TH CELEBRATION AND REUNION on June 11 we will be dedicating a memorial garden to VCS alumni and former students who have passed away. Their lives and their spirits left an imprint on our school and on all who loved them.

Andrew Howe '05
Peter Krag '04
Weston Lea '02
Jessica Pomerleau-Hanlon '02

Special thanks to alum parent **Charlotte Albers P'07** for designing the garden.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT
THE BLANCHARD/COX FAMILY



(L to R) Casey Blanchard P’08, Julia Luckett Cox ’08, and Dan Cox P’08

ALUM PARENTS Casey Blanchard and Dan Cox ’08, along with their daughter Julia Luckett Cox ’08, have given to VCS every year since 2004! They recently shared with us what Vermont Commons means to them and why they choose to give.

“We support the commitment VCS has made to deep experiential education as a means of connecting to the world’s future path. Every dollar we give has a significant rippling effect in the experience we call life!”

-Casey Blanchard P’08

“VCS has created a space to learn and develop as a person with positivity, honesty, and integrity. I am so grateful I was able to spend my high school years there enjoying engaging classes and hiking mountains on Encounter Weeks with my classmates!”

-Julia Luckett Cox ’08

“One of the many joys as a parent of a VCS student was interacting with the teachers there and listening to our daughter’s enthusiasm for the overall program. She got through the teenage years with many great memories and an inquisitive need for more education. We were delighted to be involved parents and still are!”

-Dan Cox P’08

WAYS OF GIVING

IN ADDITION TO THE ANNUAL FUND—Vermont Commons’ yearly fundraising effort that directly supports our mission and operating budget—VCS maintains several different funds for specific endeavors and programs. You can make a gift toward any of these funds at any time. Your generosity is the foundation of all that we do.

- The Class of 2020 Faculty Chair Award Fund
- The Class of 2021 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Scholarship Fund
- Encounter Week Scholarship Fund
- VCS Endowment Fund

For more information about supporting the mission and vision of VCS, contact Amber Degn, Director of Development, at adegn@vermontcommons.org or 802-923-6286.

There are many easy ways to support VCS, and all gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Whether you mail a check, make an online donation at vermontcommons.org/giving, sign up to donate monthly, or make a gift of appreciated securities, we are grateful for your support.

Planned Giving

You can help ensure a Vermont Commons education is possible for future generations of students by making a planned gift in the form of a bequest. Have you included VCS in your estate plans? Let us know! Your gift will inspire others.

YOU AND VERMONT COMMONS – BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER



Maybe VCS helped shape the person you have become...

...or there was a teacher who changed the way you look at the world

...or your child’s self-confidence blossomed on an Encounter Week

...or you have never seen your grandchild so animated when they talk about school

Whatever the reason, your support allows more students to have life-changing experiences at VCS, and allows VCS to grow and plan for the future.

Vermont Commons School sparks inquiry, opens minds, and readies students to become global citizens.

Isn’t that the way school should be?

Thank you for making a gift today.

www.vermontcommons.org/giving



Scan to give

**WHY I SUPPORT VCS:
SETH EVANS-DIFFENDERFER ’14**

“My experience at VCS meant a lot to me. Having a tight-knit community and real relationships with my teachers was really important at that time in my life. I feel very appreciative of my experience there and the path that it sent me on, and I want to be part of creating that for other people.”

ANNUAL REPORT
JULY 1, 2020 - JUNE 30, 2021
BY THE NUMBERS

109

Students in grades 6-12

27%

Students who receive financial aid

100%

Faculty & Board giving to Annual Fund

\$414,154

Total financial aid given

293

Graduates 1997-2021

197

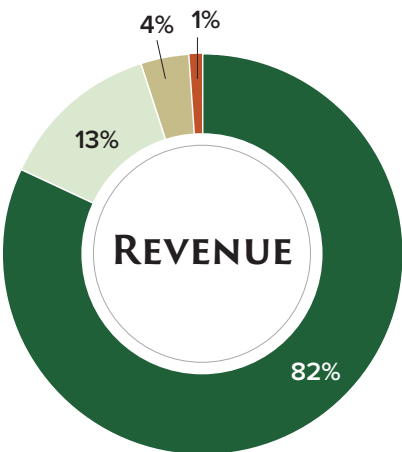
Donors

\$14,281

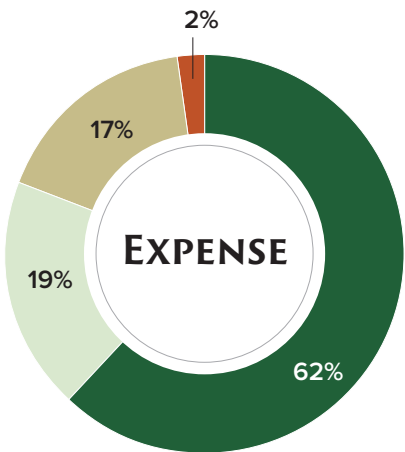
Average financial aid award

\$2.3 MILLION

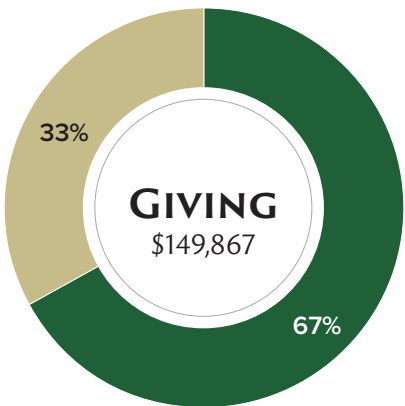
Operating Budget



- Tuition
- Grants
- Contributions
- Investments, Interest & Other Income



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



- Annual Fund & Emergency Financial Aid
- Restricted & Capital Giving

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THANK YOU to our 2021-2022 Parent Ambassadors who volunteer their time and energy in support of VCS!

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Susan Ames P'22
Andrea Balazs P'26 '28
Gillian Ehrich P'24 '27
Gwyneth Flack P'27
Hollie Foley P'24 '25 '28

Marilyn Geiger P'21 '23
Jennifer Hall P'23
Lindsay Hay P'23 '26 '28
Angie King P'28
Ashley Klein P'28
Bridget Lawson-Ryan P'22 '25

Marc Lindow P'26
Lauren Pricer P'25
Erica Spater P'25
Margie Torizzo P'26
Liz Weir P'27
Lynn Williams P'27

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING VCS!

WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL to supporters whose gifts directly impact the lives of VCS students and sustain our extraordinary learning community. This list reflects gifts between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. Thank you to all who give—at all levels, in all roles, and from all generations. VCS truly would not be here without you.

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In honor of Reeves Strawbridge '20
David Strawbridge*

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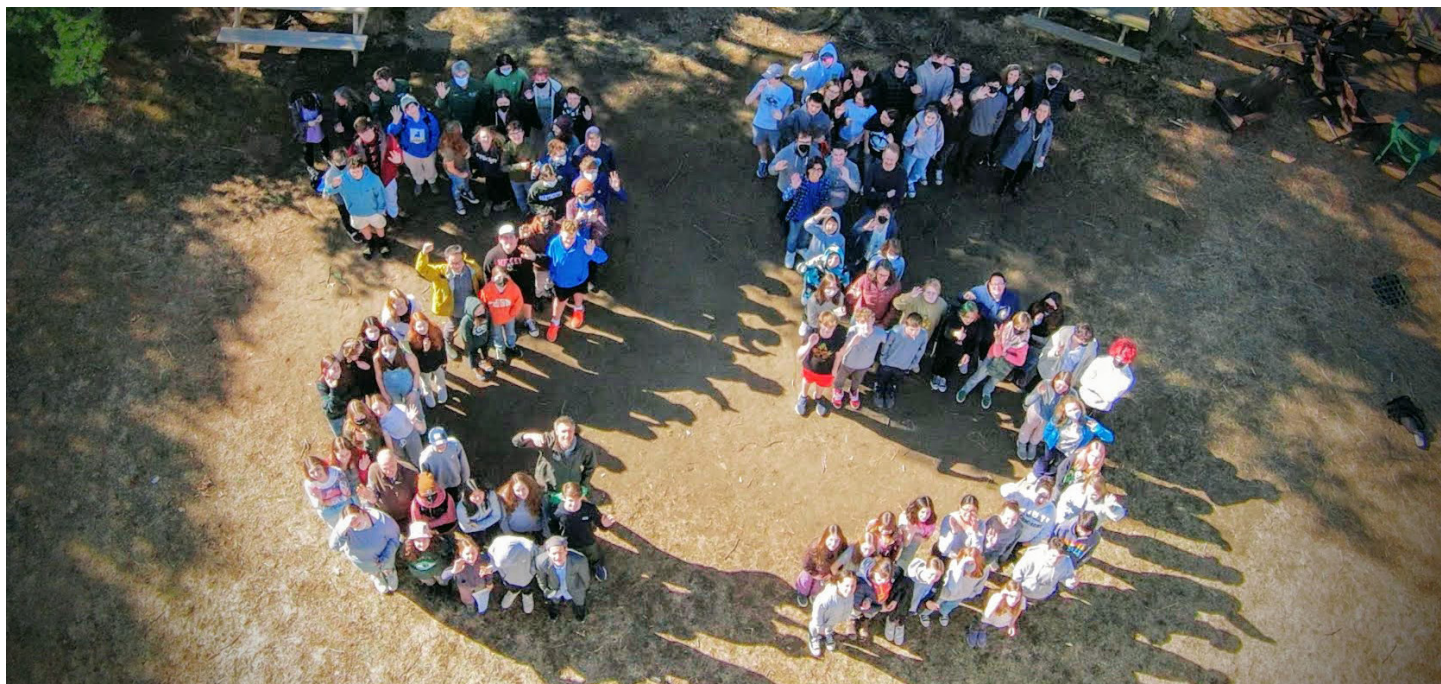
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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING 25 YEARS! CELEBRATION AND REUNION | JUNE 10-11, 2022

Reconnect with old friends and meet new ones, catch up with faculty, reminisce,
and see what's new on campus (there's a lot!). All are welcome.

See the full schedule and register at vermontcommons.org/25th
or scan the QR code



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