



VAIL MOUNTAIN SCHOOL
Known. Challenged. Inspired.

2025-2026 Annual Magazine

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Table of Contents

5 Letter from Head of School

6 Character

8 Two Sports, One Standard: *Solveig Moritz Takes Her Talents to Denver*

9 Scholar Athlete and State Champion: *Isla Elton*

10 The Discipline of the Athlete

12 2025–2026 VMS Athletics

14 VMS/SSCV Snowsports Athletes: 2025–2026 Season Overview

15 Inspirational Educator Award: *Dr. Kate Drescher*

16 The Vail Mountain School Class of 2026: *Graduation*

18 Knowledge

20 Finding Empathy Through Storytelling

21 Transferring Knowledge to the Real World: *Middle School Science Fair*

22 Counted Out Viewing

23 VMS Alum Rachel Conley Comes Full Circle with EPOC at Steadman

24 Academic Excellence in Action in Lower School

25 Learning Beyond the Classroom

26 Community

28 A Partnership That Builds Community

30 Your Philanthropy at Work: *A Letter on Purpose, Choice, and Shared Joy*

32 The Hummingbird Society: *Vail Mountain School's Grandparents*

34 Our Supporters

40 Board of Trustees and Parent Volunteers

41 Ways of Giving

42 Eagle Valley Community Foundation: *Volunteer Group of the Year*

44 Generations of Care: *Ellen Millard*

45 Theatre: *Finding Your Voice and Your Place*

46 Leadership

48 Connecting on Campus

49 Women Supporting Women in the Outdoors

50 2025-2026 Operating Revenue, Operating Expenses & Capital

52 A New 5th Grade Tradition

54 Environment

56 Rivers & Literature Course

58 Snow Science: *8th Grade Curriculum Update*

60 Declan Cunningham: *First-Ever "Town of Vail Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" Stewardship Award*

62 Alumni Connection

64 Our Newest Alumni

65 Alumni Winter Solstice Celebration

66 The Bell That Connects Us

68 Alumni Class Notes





Dear Vail Mountain School Community,

What a pleasure to invite you into our 2025-2026 VMS Magazine. Following the launch of our strategic plan, *Learning Elevated: 10 Bold Initiatives for a Decade*, this past school year marked an inspiring first year of implementation—moving our strategic vision into vibrant daily practice across campus. Throughout these pages, you will see how the pillars of our mission **Character, Knowledge, and Community** come alive, woven together with our central themes of **Academic Excellence, Experiential Learning, Leadership, and Environmental Stewardship**.

Under the umbrellas of Academic Excellence and Experiential Learning, our classrooms routinely extended into the real world. Ninth-grade students explored creative vulnerability during poetry workshops with a visiting artist, while 8th graders engaged in hands-on snow safety and avalanche science during their backcountry winter expedition. In Middle School science, student researchers advanced all the way to the Colorado State Science Fair. Connecting literature directly to Environmental Stewardship, senior seminar students journeyed down the San Juan River to study water ecology alongside creative reflection, while 5th graders gained firsthand insight into biomechanics, surgical robotics, and medical innovation during an interactive visit to The Steadman Clinic.

Our featured alumni stories in this issue highlight the lasting impact of a VMS education and the full-circle connections that enrich our school family. We showcase graduates returning to campus as medical research mentors, Science Fair judges, and community panel speakers sharing their real-world expertise with current students. We highlight the inspiring story of a second-generation graduate—following in the footsteps of her parents and sisters—who balanced the rigorous demands of elite alpine ski racing and varsity soccer to commit as a dual-sport NCAA Division I collegiate athlete. From healthcare practitioners continuing multi-generational family legacies in the valley to young leaders serving on local boards and mountain operations, our alumni demonstrate what it means to lead with purpose.

Demonstrating Character and Leadership, our community impact reached far beyond our campus walls. VMS was proudly honored as the regional Volunteer Group of the Year for our experiential Spanish language and service-learning programs, and we celebrated decades of fruitful community partnership through initiatives like SummerQuest as well as newer partnerships with Longer Tables. Female student leaders gained invaluable career mentorship alongside professional ski patrollers during Young Women's Day on Vail Mountain. And on the snow and courts, student-athletes achieved extraordinary success—from junior freeride snowboarders competing internationally at the world championships to an individual state championship in Nordic skiing and a historic regional postseason run for Upper School Girls Basketball.

None of these achievements would be possible without the extraordinary commitment of our school community. The inaugural year of the Hummingbird Society was a resounding success, thoughtfully connecting grandparents to campus life while generating vital support for our educational programs. Additionally, our annual Gala and VMS Fund campaign exceeded expectations, securing essential funding to enhance athletic programs, broaden access, and provide renewal grants for our incredibly talented and dedicated faculty.

I am deeply grateful for your trust, energy, and shared dedication as we continue to fulfill our school's vision to **Educate and Elevate Humans for Good**.

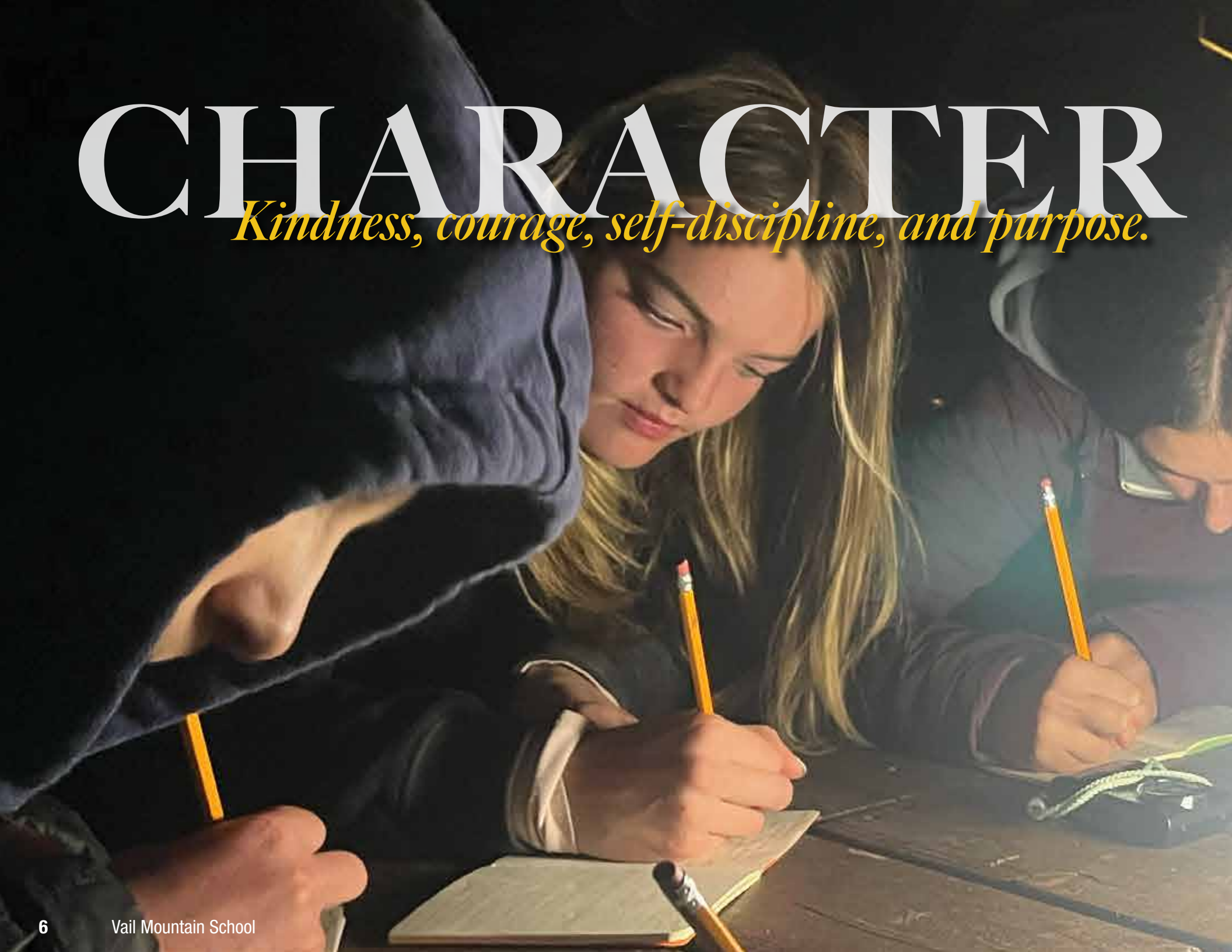
Warmly,

Steve Bileca

Head of School

CHARACTER

Kindness, courage, self-discipline, and purpose.







Less than 1% of first-year female student-athletes at Division I schools are recruited to play two sports in college.

Athlete Spotlight:

Two Sports, One Standard: *Solveig Moritz Takes Her Talents to Denver*

For Solveig Moritz, competing at a high level has meant more than committing to one sport. A 2026 graduate of Vail Mountain School, Solveig has spent her high school years moving between alpine ski racing and soccer while also keeping up with the demands of a rigorous academic program. This fall, she will take that unique combination to the University of Denver and compete in both sports at the D1 level.

Solveig's path to Denver has deep roots at VMS. Her parents, Kaia Moritz '89 and Misha Moritz '88, attended the school, as did her three older sisters, Annika '19, Liv '23 and Kjersti '23. Athletics have been a family affair. Liv and Kjersti are both dual-sport collegiate athletes, as well as current members of the U.S. Ski Team.

Growing up amongst accomplished siblings meant Solveig had plenty of examples around her and no shortage of competition. In the U.S. Alpine Championships at Vail's Golden Peak, Solveig finished seventh overall in the Super-G, ahead of her sisters, prompting a result that was bound to generate some family conversation.

As a FIS athlete with Ski & Snowboard Club Vail, Solveig has competed in both technical and speed events and traveled the globe for training and competition. Skiing at an elite level while attending VMS requires a significant degree of independence. Training schedules can begin early, competitions can take students out of school for days at a time, and travel and recovery have to fit alongside homework, tests, and everything else that comes with being a high school student. For Solveig, managing the demands of full-time ski racing meant taking ownership of her academics and making the most of the time she physically had at school.

Soccer added another layer to an already demanding schedule. As a four-year varsity player for the Rangers, Solveig played both midfielder and forward, adapting to where she was needed most. When the spring soccer seasons and skiing competitions overlapped, the challenge was threefold. Finding the discipline to stay on top of schoolwork while simultaneously balancing the individual pursuit of ski racing and captaining the VMS soccer team was no easy accomplishment.

That range will serve Solveig well at Denver, where she will have the rare opportunity to pursue two athletic passions while earning her degree.

During the 2025–2026 season, Ski & Snowboard Club Vail (SSCV) alpine skier Solveig Moritz earned key honors, selection roster spots, and competition achievements in FIS and regional events:

Honors and Selections

2025/2026 SYNC Performance Team Selection: Named to the prestigious 2025/2026 national SYNC Team, which recognizes a select group of top junior alpine ski racers across the United States.

FIS & SSCV Competition Achievements

U.S. Alpine National Championships Competitor: Qualified for and represented SSCV at the U.S. Alpine Championships in Vail.

Murphy Roberts Holiday Classic U18 Podium: Secured a 2nd-place finish in the U18 category during the FIS Giant Slalom events and was named a top U18 standout in night slalom events.

FIS Top-10 Finishes: Achieved multiple top-15 and top-10 finishes in FIS-sanctioned events, including an 8th-place result in the Giant Slalom at Vail in April 2026.

Nor-Am Cup Standings: Competed at the elite North American Cup level, earning top-10 regional discipline standings in Downhill and Super G during the 2025 and 2026 FIS seasons.

Athlete Spotlight:

Scholar Athlete and State Champion: *Isla Elton*

Isla Elton's 2026 season earned her two distinctions: Colorado High School Ski League State Champion and Vail Mountain School Female Scholar Athlete. The junior won the 5-kilometer race at Snow Mountain Ranch by 25 seconds, adding the title to a Nordic career that already included two state championships in 2025.

The result followed a season in which she consistently challenged herself and her competitors. At a January league race, she won both the 3.5-kilometer classic and 4.7-kilometer skate races, and she closed the regular season with another victory in the 6-kilometer skate at Gold Run Nordic Center.

But Elton's accomplishments extend well beyond race results. In presenting her Scholar Athlete award, Annie Halloran '26 described an athlete who brings the same discipline to the classroom that she brings to the snow, "taking hard classes with grace, meeting with her teachers, and putting in the extra time at school." That commitment carries across her many athletic pursuits, including competing with Battle Mountain, SSCV, and VMS.

"She consistently brings a focused, best effort, and it has been rewarding to see that dedication translate into strong performances on race day," one coach said. Another described her simply: "She inspires the team and is a good member of the VMS community."

The combination of excellence and humility is part of what makes Elton's accomplishments so notable. As Halloran put it, "This athlete is so humble in her accomplishments that most wouldn't know she has won three state championship races, runs cross country, all while scoring goals in soccer."

For Elton, competition is also an opportunity to become a better athlete and teammate. At the 2025 state championships, she spoke about how her strongest competition pushed her to improve: "She pushed me to be a better athlete and competitor, and she's a role model." A year later, she continued to approach racing with that same focus, using competition not simply to win, but to challenge herself.

Repeating as a state champion is an accomplishment. Doing so while pursuing challenging academics and contributing across multiple teams speaks to the self-discipline to keep showing up, the courage to push herself, and the humility to let the work speak for itself.





The Discipline of the Athlete

At first glance, the stories of both Julie Brown '27 and Kaleb Gibbs '27 are about freeride snowboarding at the highest level of junior competition. This winter, both traveled to Kappl, Austria, to compete at the FIS Junior Freeride World Championships, representing not only themselves but the years of preparation behind them.

The more revealing story is that these are not only disciplined athletes but also incredibly well-rounded people. In a world that often wants you to only be one thing, they are unique examples of multifaceted excellence.

The FIS Junior Freeride World Championships are among the sport's most competitive international events, bringing together the top junior riders from 13 countries to compete on steep, technical alpine faces where athletes have a single opportunity to choose and execute their line. Set to become an Olympic sport for the first time in 2030, Freeride is notorious for its "one run, one chance" format, where athletes are not able to preride a course and must choose a line based on visual inspection only. Every decision the athletes make, from route selection to cliff drops to speed management, is judged on criteria including line choice, air and style, control, fluidity and technique. Returning to Kappl for his second appearance, Kaleb approached the event with the confidence that comes from experience. Choosing an ambitious line traditionally only taken by skiers, his goal was to push the limits of what was possible for snowboard freeriders. He finished 13th, sharing, "Unfortunately, I wasn't able to stomp the landing, but I'm proud of myself for going big and pushing my line. I hope to be back next year." Julie, competing at Junior Worlds for the first time, delivered a composed and technically strong run to finish 4th overall, less than a point off the podium and the top American in the women's snowboard field. "I'm pretty stoked on my run, just being out there was truly amazing," says Julie. While the performances stood on years of preparation, they also underscored the mindset both athletes have exercised: competing at this level depends as much on judgment, composure, and the willingness to commit as it does on technical ability.

For Kaleb and Julie, competitive athletics is woven into their lives, not set apart from them. As students, teammates, community members, and athletes, they are navigating the demands of an ambitious academic program while pursuing goals that require significant time, travel, and commitment.

That balance is not accidental. It is the result of learning how to prioritize, adapt, and stay engaged across competing responsibilities.

"Going to VMS means that I'm fortunate enough to be surrounded by a school community that wants to see me succeed both inside and outside of the classroom," Julie says. "VMS has given me so much more than help with academics."

For Julie, that broader education has meant saying yes to experiences beyond her primary sport. During her time at VMS, she has participated in soccer, telemark skiing, environmental club, philanthropy, and service opportunities, while also traveling and learning from cultures outside her own.

Those experiences have shaped the way she approaches competition. Her coach describes a season defined not only by technical progress—greater precision, balance, and adaptability—but by consistency, resilience, and a willingness to support those around her. Julie's pursuit of Junior Worlds required physical preparation and mental discipline, but it also reflected a larger pattern: the ability to commit deeply while remaining open to growth. "This year, Julie set her sights on qualifying for Junior Worlds, and her dedication reflected that goal. She's pushed her limits with courage and humility,

demonstrating the character and perseverance that define SSCV's core values," says Kevin Sundheim, the freeride snowboard coach of Ski & Snowboard Club Vail. Kevin has coached Julie since she was a freshman and Kaleb since he was in 4th grade.

Kaleb's experience at VMS has similarly been shaped by the opportunity to explore beyond the thing he already excelled in. "It would've been very easy for me to simply stick to what I knew in snowboarding because that was what I was good at," he says. "But the lack of pressure to be an amazing athlete in a specific sport at VMS gave me the confidence to try new sports that I'm not great at." That confidence has led him to play soccer, basketball, and lacrosse alongside his snowboarding career. For Kaleb, the value of those experiences is not measured in wins or statistics, but in the willingness to be a beginner again. "I feel the freedom to make mistakes, and I have the opportunity to learn from them," he says.

That mindset has carried into his riding. According to his coach, Kaleb has made significant strides this season, developing greater control, adaptability, and confidence in challenging terrain. "His ability to rebound from setbacks shows maturity and mental toughness, allowing him to tackle bigger challenges with confidence and creativity." Just as importantly, he has emerged as a teammate and leader, demonstrating the character and commitment that strengthen the entire program. His accomplishments on the mountain were recognized alongside his academic dedication when he received the prestigious Scholar Athlete Award, chosen by the Upper School faculty for a student who has excelled both in athletics and in the classroom.

The demands of pursuing excellence in multiple arenas are real. For Kaleb, winter days often begin early on the mountain and end late after practices, homework, and

travel. "When I play basketball and train for snowboarding, I don't have any days off," he says. "Early mornings on the mountain, late night basketball practices, and traveling to competitions is often exhausting and at times overwhelming. That being said, it is by no means impossible, and for me, it's definitely worth it." The ability to sustain that schedule depends not only on personal discipline, but also on the support structures around him. "The teachers at VMS are always very accommodating and willing to help me understand content after missing school for extended periods of time," Kaleb says. "Their genuine care, flexibility, and support has made it possible for me to be both successful in the classroom and on the mountain."

That flexibility is central to the VMS approach. Students are encouraged to pursue meaningful commitments outside the classroom, and faculty recognize that those experiences are part of the education itself. The goal is not simply to help students manage more, but to help them understand how to engage fully—with their work, their communities, and their own interests.

Julie and Kaleb's achievements at Junior Worlds are impressive. But the more lasting lesson is found in the process that brought them there: the ability to commit, adjust, persevere, and remain curious while pursuing something difficult. Together, they'll travel to Austria again in January to compete in the 2027 world championships during what will be their last year as Junior competitors, a culmination of all they worked for and achieved as Junior athletes.

The discipline of the athlete is not only found in training sessions or competition runs. It is reflected in the choices students make every day—how they spend their time, what challenges they embrace, and how they show up for the communities around them.





2025–2026 VMS Athletics

At Vail Mountain School, we believe athletics are about far more than competition. They are an important part of how we develop character, teaching students to work together, persevere through challenges, respond to adversity, and celebrate the success of others. On a team, students learn lessons about commitment, humility, leadership, and resilience that extend well beyond the playing field.

Throughout the 2025–2026 school year, our Middle School and Upper School athletic programs continued to thrive, with strong participation and meaningful growth. More importantly, our student-athletes continued to demonstrate what it means to compete with purpose, support one another, and represent VMS Rangers with pride.

Middle School Athletics Program

Middle School athletics serve as a vital foundation for developing essential life skills such as teamwork, integrity, perseverance, and sportsmanship. As our program participation continues to grow—with offerings that include soccer, basketball, cross country, girls' volleyball, alpine and Nordic skiing, and boys' lacrosse—students are challenged to stretch their abilities, support one another, and grow both as athletes and as individuals. Through these experiences, they build confidence, strengthen connections, and create lasting memories that reach well beyond the playing field.

Upper School Athletic Program

In the Upper School, athletics offer students the opportunity to elevate their commitment, sharpen their skills, and take on the challenges of competition and leadership. Our student-athletes regularly demonstrate grit, discipline, and resilience as they balance the demands of academics and extracurricular involvement. The bonds they build, the obstacles they navigate, and the successes they achieve speak to both their personal dedication and the shared strength of our athletic community.

Upper School Athletic Highlights

FALL

Volleyball:

- **Weston Phillips:** 2nd Team All-Conference

Soccer:

- **Colm Kinney:** 2nd Team All-Conference
- **Winston Pillsbury:** All-Conference Honorable Mention

Golf:

- **Team:** Vail Mountain Invitational Champions

BMHS Cross Country:

- **Isla Elton:** 1st Team All Region, All-State Honorable Mention
- **Caroline Provencher:** 1st Team All Region, All-State Honorable Mention

BMHS Speech and Debate:

- **Espen Plotkin:** National Speech & Debate Tournament Qualifier, Semi-Finalist CHSAA State Tournament

Spirit of Sport Awards

Izzy Adochio
Annie Halloran
Andi Payen
Luke Schwartz



US Girls Basketball made VMS history, heading to Regionals for the first time!



WINTER

Girls Basketball:

- **Izzy Adochio:** 2nd Team All-Conference
- **Abby Adochio:** All-Conference Honorable Mention

Alpine Skiing:

- **Gracie Cohn:** Team Colorado Participant
- **Carter Pierce:** Team Colorado Participant & First Team All-State

Nordic Skiing:

- **Isla Elton:** Skate Ski State Champion, All-State Team – Second Team
- **Teddy Brunner:** Skate Ski Runner Up State Championship, All-State Team – Second Team

Mountaineers Girls Hockey:

- **Kira Scheidegger, Dylan Corrigan, Jayden Dillon, Lindsey Wadey:** Girls 19U – League Champions of the WCHL Girls 19U Division
- **Bodhi Etters:** Boys 14U Bantam A CAHA State Champions and WCHL League Champions

SPRING

Girls Soccer:

- **Solveig Moritz:** 1st Team All-Conference
- **Kiana Garcia:** 1st Team All-Conference
- **Weston Phillips:** 2nd Team All-Conference

Boys Lacrosse:

- **Winston Pillsbury:** 2nd Team All-Conference
- **Fischer Bolster:** All-Conference Honorable Mention
- **Luke Schwartz:** All-Conference Honorable Mention
- **George Reihe:** All-Conference Honorable Mention

BMHS Girls Lacrosse

- **Izzy Adochio:** 1st Team All-State, 1st Team All-Conference
- **Lindsey Wadey:** All-State Honorable Mention, 2nd Team All-Conference

VCHS Volleyball:

- **Luke Geller:** 1st Team All-State, 1st Team All-Conference

Glenwood HS Swimming:

- **Tennyson Sipes:** 1st Team All-State, 200 Free Relay Champion

RECRUITED COLLEGE ATHLETES

- **Kiana Garcia Rios**
- **Solveig Moritz**

VMS/SSCV Snowsports Athletes: 2025-2026 Season Overview

IFSA Junior Freeride Championships

Kicking Horse Mountain Resort | April 2026

- **Kaleb Gibbs:** 2nd Place at the event; 1st Place Overall in the Americas, U19 Snowboard Men
- **Julie Brown:** 1st Place at the event; 3rd Place Overall in the Americas, U19 Snowboard Women

IFSA National & Regional Events

Telluride Regional | February 2026

- **Sydney Thompson:** 2nd Place, Regional

Copper IFSA 2 Comp | February 2026

- **Kaleb Gibbs:** 1st Place, U19 Snowboard Men
- **Ana Clave Padilla:** 2nd Place, U15 Women Skier
- **Logan Jones:** 4th Place, U15 Male Skier

Snowbird Nationals | March 2026

- **Kaleb Gibbs:** 1st Place
- **Julie Brown:** 3rd Place

Vail Regional 2 Freeride Competition | March 2026

- **Tyler Moore:** 2nd Place, U15 Male Skier
- **Logan Jones:** 5th Place, U15 Male Skier

Monarch 2 Regional | March 2026

- **Ana Clave Padilla:** 1st Place

Aspen Regional Competition | March 2026

- **Tyler Moore:** 5th Place, U15 Male Skier

Snowboard Park and Pipe

Halfpipe Event at Copper Mountain | January 2026

- **Tesla Goldstein:** 3rd Place

Steamboat Springs StreetStyle Rail Jam – Under the Lights | March 2026

- **Tesla Goldstein:** 2nd Place

Steamboat Springs SB Halfpipe | March 2026

- **Tesla Goldstein:** 2nd Place

Alpine Racing

Copper Mountain Alpine Skiing FIS | October 2025

- **Solveig Mortiz:** 2nd Place, Women's Giant Slalom

Loveland Sync Cup | December 2025

- **Sege Pomerantz:** 1st Place, Slalom

Sync Cup Howelsen Hill | January 2026

- **Sege Pomerantz:** 3rd Place, Slalom

GS Race at Eldora | February 2026

- **Millie Waugh:** 1st Place

U12 Super G Race at Aspen RMD | February 2026

- **Barrett Groff:** 1st Place

U12 Championships at Powderhorn | March 2026

- **Barrett Groff:** 1st Place in all 3 races (Two SL and one GS), Colorado U12 State Champion

Whistler Cup | April 2026

- **Cody Martz:** 1st Place, Team Panel Slalom; 2nd Place, Men's Giant Slalom; 3rd Place, Men's Slalom

Loveland Derby | April 2026

- **Peter Mennen:** 3rd Place, Slalom

Freestyle

U12 Boys Rocky Mountain Qualifier Series Championships | March 2026

- **Hudson Leonard:** 2nd Place, Mogul Duals

U9 Rocky Mountain Freestyle Devo Championships | March 2026

- **Lawson Honkamp:** 1st Place, Moguls

Cross Country

Qualified for Junior National Championships | March 2026

- **Isla Elton, Tyler Ciluzzi and Teddy Brunner**

U14 Girls Overall Regional Rankings

- **Georgia Robison:** 2nd Place

U14 Boys Overall Regional Rankings

- **Hudson Ciluzzi:** 4th Place
- **Tucker Moore:** 5th Place

SSCV Year-End Awards

Campbell Sullivan SkiFast Award Nordic

- **Tucker Moore**

SSCV Student of the Year Award, Vail Mountain School (Lower/Middle School)

- **Ana Clave Padilla**

SSCV Student of the Year Award, Vail Mountain School (Upper School)

- **Kaleb Gibbs**

Gaynor Miller Snowsports Nominee Nordic

- **Isla Elton**



Inspirational Educator Award:

Dr. Kate Drescher

This year, Vail Mountain School honored Dr. Kate Drescher with the Inspirational Educator Award, recognizing 21 years of work grounded in empathy, purpose, and an unwavering commitment to students.

Presented at Commencement, the award honors an educator who embodies the spirit of longtime VMS mathematics teacher Oliver Compton: someone who sets high expectations while offering the care and support students need to grow. In introducing Dr. Drescher, graduating senior Robby Steele described her as someone who creates “an open environment free of judgment,” where students can express themselves, their struggles, and their ideas. “There is a place for everyone to be heard, valued, and supported in this community,” he said.

For Dr. Drescher, that sense of belonging and care is central to her work and impact at VMS. “I consider it a great honor to walk beside our students as they navigate the ups and downs of life,” she says. “I am always amazed by the immense amount of growth that young people can make as their brains are establishing new neural connections.”

Her work takes many forms at VMS. As a clinical psychologist, senior class homebase advisor, and humane education teacher, Dr. Drescher works with students from Lower School through Upper School. “VMS is a dynamic cross-age community in word and in action,” she says. “I enjoy the fact that no two days are alike, which keeps me on my toes.”

Her commitment to students also extends into helping them recognize their own ability to create positive change. In her 5th-grade humane education class, students investigate local and global problems before developing solutions that benefit people, animals, and the environment. It is an approach that reflects Dr. Drescher's belief in giving young people both the knowledge and agency to make a difference.

And then there is Beignet, Dr. Drescher's Canine Companion's Facility Dog who has become a beloved member of the VMS community. She offers students “unconditional support” and has a unique ability to recognize what kind of assistance someone needs at any given time. “Whether she is supporting a student who is practicing their oral reading fluency skills or she is helping someone restore a sense of bodily calm after feeling panicked, Beignet knows just what to do.”

Dr. Drescher's connection to VMS is personal as well as professional. At its old Dowd Junction location, she attended VMS herself, as one of just two students in her first-grade class. Years later, she graduated from VMS in 1988. Then, in 2006, when former Head of School Peter Abuisi asked her to develop a mission-driven K–12 counseling program, she returned to VMS as an eager employee.

Now, over two decades later, she remains focused on the same purpose: supporting students and families at different stages in their development. “Collaborating with and supporting parents is another part of the work that brings me great joy,” she shared.

“The strength of our community is our rapport-driven model and the mutual respect that exists between students and teachers,” Dr. Drescher says. “I am humbled and honored to receive this award but feel there are so many of my colleagues who are just as worthy of this recognition.”

Dr. Drescher's impact reaches far beyond the domain of her office. As Robby Steele reflected, “What stands out the most to me about Kate Drescher is that she genuinely lives the values VMS encourages every day.” Whether supporting a student, colleague, or family, she leads with the same kindness, empathy, and humility, quietly building a stronger community without asking for recognition in return. It is that everyday commitment to helping others feel seen, supported, and empowered that makes her a clear choice for this year's Inspirational Educator Award.



The Vail Mountain School Class of 2026: *Graduation*

The Vail Mountain School community gathered at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater this spring to celebrate the graduation of the Class of 2026. Surrounded by family, friends, faculty, and classmates, 19 seniors crossed the stage, marking the culmination of years of academic achievement, personal growth, and meaningful experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Throughout the ceremony, student speakers reflected on the relationships and experiences that defined their time at VMS. Senior speaker Maris McPheeters acknowledged the significance of the moment, describing graduation as a rare opportunity to look both backward and forward.

"To use a river metaphor, I would like to say that as graduating seniors, we've reached the delta, where the river meets the sea. Like a delta, we are in a state and place of great change. If we are confused as to who we are now, then it is because, for a rare time in our lives, we can see the confluence of who we were and who we will become, and we see it with such clarity that we feel blind," she said in the opening speech of the ceremony, *The Dedication*.

Diego Romero reflected on the class's journey together, beginning with the senior San Juan River trip that was part of their English class, *Rivers & Literature*, and continuing through senior projects, performances, athletic seasons, and everyday moments shared with classmates. "Looking back on these memories, I'm proud to say we did this together with our reliance on each other." Diego concluded by reminding his classmates that their greatest accomplishments extend beyond academics or accolades. "At the end of the day, with or without the academic or extracurricular successes, our value is not determined by grades or recognition, but by our character, kindness, and perseverance."

In his commencement address, Head of School Steve Bileca challenged graduates to approach the future with courage and purpose, drawing from the Class of 2026's chosen quotation from Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" He encouraged students to embrace lives that are thoughtful, audacious, and guided by their values as they leave VMS and begin their next chapter.

The ceremony honored a class that has grown through challenge, embraced opportunity, and contributed meaningfully to the Vail Mountain School community. As the newest alumni stepped into the next phase of their lives, they carried with them the friendships, experiences, and sense of purpose that have defined their time at VMS.





Congrats to the Award Winners:

- Sally Johnston Award: *Izzy Adochio*
- Intellectual Curiosity Award: *Luke Schwartz*
- Service to the Community Award: *Bergen Jacobs*
- Citizenship Award: *Annie Halloran*
- Scholar Athlete Award: *Kaleb Gibbs*
- Scholar Athlete Award: *Kiana Garcia & Isla Elton*





KNOWLEDGE

Intellectual curiosity, creativity, and real-world applications.



Finding Empathy Through Storytelling

At VMS, the ninth-grade slam poetry experience is an invitation for students to be vulnerable in front of their peers, and practice listening with empathy when others do the same. Over several weeks, students turn personal experiences, observations, and ideas into original poems, discovering that creativity can be a way to understand both themselves and the people around them.

The experience begins with a visit and workshop with award-winning slam poet Andre Bradford, also known as S.C. Says. An Austin-based performer, teacher, and two-time Austin Poetry Slam Champion, Bradford has spent more than a decade using poetry to explore vulnerability, identity, mental health, relationships, and social issues. His work introduces students to slam poetry as a performance style and a vehicle for connection and change.

Bradford first performs for the ninth grade, often bringing students to laughter, tears, and of course snaps, a common signal in slam poetry settings that an audience can use to express resonance with the performance. He then leads an 80-minute writing workshop, giving students tools to shape their own experiences into poetry. Through prompts, experimentation, and collaboration, students are encouraged to take creative risks and discover that there is no single way to tell a story.

That creative process culminates in the ninth-grade Slam Poetry Competition. Students take the stage to perform their poems, often sharing something personal, with the event designed around connection as much as competition. Upper School students who have experienced the slam themselves return as judges, offering thoughtful feedback while listening with the empathy that comes from having once stood in the same place.

This year, Sadie Weissman won the competition with “Rainbows,” a poem about her hope that people can look beyond the perfect red A. The Upper School judges praised her stage presence, memorization, and artful lyricism.

Especially in the Vail Valley, the 9th-grade slam poetry experience is a rare opportunity to encounter a professional slam poet, experiment with an expressive art form, and hear classmates share parts of themselves that might otherwise remain unseen. It's a pivotal memory for students as they move through their first year in the Upper School. Throughout this project, they practice the creative courage to find their own voices and the empathy to truly hear someone else's.



Transferring Knowledge to the Real World: *Middle School Science Fair*

From classroom experiments to a state competition, this year's Middle School Science Fair gave VMS students a chance to test their ideas, present their findings, and learn from scientists—including several VMS alumni who returned to judge their work.

For 7th and 8th graders, the Science Fair is an exercise in the full scientific method. Students develop their own testable questions, conduct background research, design and carry out experiments, analyze data, and draw conclusions based on evidence. The process culminates in presentations to community scientists, who evaluate projects and nominate two students from each grade to advance to the Western Colorado Regional Science Fair.

This past year, 7th graders Tucker Moore and Mabel Grimsley advanced through the regional competition to the Colorado Science and Engineering State Fair at Colorado State University. Both represented VMS at the state level with impressive results. Tucker placed third in the junior division of Physics and Astronomy for Roll Goal, which investigated how air pressure affects bicycle-tire performance. Mabel placed second in the junior division Biomedical and Health Sciences for Elite Essential Oils, which examined the effect of essential oils on bacterial growth. She also received a certificate from Thermo Fisher Scientific and a nomination to enter the 2026 Junior Innovators Challenge.

The VMS Middle School Science Fair brought several VMS alumni back to campus, connecting current students with graduates who have carried their own interests in science into the world. Rachel Conley, a 2020 graduate, now works as a research assistant in the Biomotion Lab at the Steadman Philippon Research Institute, where she also mentors VMS students through the SPRI Independent Research Study. Ellen Millard, a VMS alumna and naturopathic physician, recently returned to the Vail Valley to open Streamside Healing Arts, her own medical practice. Her sister Cynthia Edgerton, a 2010 graduate and current Major in the US Army, also came to participate. Kate Kirwood, who graduated from VMS in 2019, studied biology with a concentration in neuroscience at Colby College, and is now going to med school, was another judge for the Middle School student competition. Together, the alumni brought perspectives from research, medicine, and the life sciences to the students' presentations.

For Tucker and Mabel, the Science Fair turned curiosity into something tangible: a question, an experiment, a body of evidence, and ultimately a contribution to a larger scientific conversation. Their success at the state level was a meaningful result, but so was the process and broader VMS community engagement that got them there.



Counted Out Viewing

We tend to think of math as a subject we take in school. Counted Out asks us to think about it as something much bigger.

The documentary, directed by Vicki Abeles, challenges the myth that some people are simply “math people” while others are not. That distinction, the film suggests, is not only inaccurate but limiting: when we convince ourselves that mathematical thinking is something you are either born with or without, we can close off opportunities before we ever give ourselves the chance to develop the skill. It makes the case that mathematical and data literacy are increasingly essential to understanding the systems that shape our lives, from algorithms and elections to the economy, criminal justice, and climate change. If math helps govern the world around us, the film asks, what happens when only some people feel equipped to understand it?

In March, Vail Mountain School brought that question to the larger Vail Valley community with a free screening of Counted Out as part of its Speaker Series. The well-attended event brought together students, parents, educators, alumni, and community members, and the conversation didn't end with the film. Upper School Director Maggie Pavlik moderated a panel on a lifetime of numeracy, bringing together VMS alumni Finn Rooney '21, a remote machine learning analyst; Travis Coggin '98, immediate past mayor of Vail and a professional in real estate and family office management; and Alex Biegler '05, owner and CEO of Jack + Sage, alongside Mathematics Department Chair Tanya Boderck and Lower School Director and former Mathematics Department Chair Kristin Douthitt.

Together, the film and discussion offered a broader view of mathematics, encouraging a growth mindset among students that aligns with the school's strategic priority of elevating academic excellence. As Daniel Finkel, founder of Math for Love, says in the film, “Everyone is capable of mathematical thinking. It's like an inheritance you get just for being human.”

For VMS, hosting the screening was an opportunity to extend learning beyond the classroom and invite the broader community into a conversation, reframing math education from a rote memorization task into a vital tool for civic participation and social justice.

FOR MORE
INFORMATION
& WATCH THE
TRAILER:



A FILM BY VICKI ABELES

COUNTED OUT

Math is power.



VMS Alum Rachel Conley Comes Full Circle with EPOC at Steadman

Rachel Conley's journey with the Education and Public Outreach Committee (EPOC) at the Steadman Philippon Research Institute (SPRI) is a story of coming full circle. As a Vail Mountain School student, Rachel participated in EPOC, gaining hands-on experience in STEM research at a world-renowned facility right in the Vail Valley. Today, she returns as a research assistant at the SPRI in the Biomotion Lab, mentoring current VMS students through the same program she once navigated.

After graduating from VMS in 2020, Rachel attended the University of San Diego and later taught chemistry at Phillips Academy, inspired by her VMS science teacher, Mr. Sappenfield. Her teaching experience now informs her mentorship at Steadman. "Being a teacher taught me to nurture curiosity," Rachel says. "EPOC students are used to figuring things out independently, so it can be frustrating when answers aren't immediate. I encourage them to ask questions, embrace the learning process, and sit with their curiosity, even in a high-pressure, prestigious environment like Steadman."

She also understands the challenges students face in EPOC. "The program includes visiting labs, meeting mentors, and completing a research project. Often, the hardest part is deciding on a research topic and knowing where to start. I remember that frustration and now guide students like Bergen and Alondra (pictured here) through it."

Looking ahead, Rachel plans to apply to medical school this spring, with an interest in pediatrics. She hopes to continue combining her passion for science, mentorship, and patient education. "I will always consider myself an educator," she says. "Whether mentoring VMS students or explaining medical concepts to future patients, helping others understand and feel empowered is central to what I do."

Rachel credits VMS for preparing her for college and beyond. "The school taught me to communicate with adults, take initiative, and seek out mentors intentionally," she reflects. "Leadership opportunities showed me that you get out what you put in, and the supportive community prepared me for both academic and personal growth."

From a VMS student exploring EPOC to a mentor guiding the next generation, Rachel Conley's journey illustrates the power of curiosity, education, and giving back to the community that helped shape her.

Academic Excellence in Action in Lower School

Academic excellence is not simply about what students know. It is about what they can do with what they know.

Under the guidance of 5th grade teacher Ms. Wheeler, our 5th graders put that idea into practice through a VMS version of Smash Boom Best, a famous podcast, taking on the challenge of making a compelling case for why one “cool thing” should prevail over another. Their debates included paddleboarding vs. kayaking, ice cream vs. donuts, and board games vs. video games.

Behind the fun was a significant amount of learning. Students researched, wrote, developed arguments, cited evidence, considered their audience, edited and refined their work, and practiced the art of persuasive communication. They drew on ethos, logos, and pathos to build arguments that were credible, logical, and compelling.

What was particularly rewarding was watching students move from initial ideas on paper to confidently communicating their thinking behind the microphone. They were not simply completing an assignment. They were applying the skills they had been developing in the classroom in ways that felt authentic and meaningful.

This was an excellent example of what a VMS education sought to provide: opportunities for students to take what they learned in the classroom and put it to work in the world around them.

LISTEN
TO THE
PODCASTS:





Learning Beyond the Classroom

Some of the most meaningful learning happens when students have the opportunity to see their classroom learning applied in the real world.

Our 5th graders visited The Steadman Clinic, where they were introduced to the science, technology, and innovation behind one of the world's leading orthopedic research and medical facilities. Designed specifically for 5th graders from across the Valley, the experience gave students a glimpse into the many ways science and technology can be used to help people heal and return to the activities they love.

Students explored the biomedical engineering lab and learned how researchers freeze cells to support their work, while also getting an introduction to some of the tools and processes scientists use in chemistry. In the robotics lab, students saw how robotics can be used to conduct experiments and how successful research can ultimately be shared with medical professionals around the world.

The hands-on experiences continued in the surgical lab, where students used actual surgical tools and cameras to practice removing foreign objects from models of shoulders and knees. In the biomechanics room, they saw how technologies such as motion capture can help doctors and scientists collect data about how patients move during recovery and use that information to better support rehabilitation.

For our students, this was much more than a field trip. It was an opportunity to connect the science they study in the classroom to the work of engineers, researchers, physicians, and other professionals who are using that knowledge to solve real problems.

Experiences like this help students begin to see themselves as scientists, engineers, researchers, and problem-solvers. Just as importantly, they expand students' understanding of what is possible and help them recognize that the skills they are developing today can have a meaningful impact on the world around them.

We are grateful to The Steadman Clinic for opening its doors to our students and helping them see what can happen when curiosity, science, and innovation come together.

COMMUNITY

Inclusivity, trust, belonging, cross-age interactions, and empathy.





A Partnership That Builds Community

Every July, school buses roll onto the Vail Mountain School campus carrying local middle schoolers ready for something special. For four weeks, these students—who don't attend VMS during the school year—get access to a completely free academic enrichment experience in a summer camp-like setting.

Complete with free transportation, hot lunches, academic support, outdoor field trip adventures, and games, SummerQuest is built entirely on removing barriers and welcoming kids with open arms.

It's an incredible tradition, made possible by a remarkable partnership.

If you pull up a chair at a Longer Tables dinner, you'll witness something remarkable: Upper Schoolers, local leaders, and teachers sitting shoulder to shoulder, sharing a meal and engaged in real, unfiltered conversation. It's a simple act, but in a world that often feels divided, sitting together is revolutionary. For a quarter century, Alpine Bank has been a partner in helping build a stronger, more connected Eagle County community. Over the last 25 years, the bank has contributed more than \$220,000 to VMS initiatives that extend beyond the campus and create lasting impact throughout the Vail Valley.

In addition to its longevity, what makes this partnership so meaningful is the values it reflects: inclusion, empathy, moral courage, and the belief that education is strongest when it brings people together.

Opening the Doors of VMS

One of the clearest examples is SummerQuest, a program Alpine Bank has supported for 29 years. Founded in 1995, SummerQuest was designed to bridge the gap between Vail Mountain School and the broader Eagle County community. Each summer, middle school students from local public schools spend four weeks strengthening academic skills, exploring the outdoors, creating art, playing sports, and building friendships. The program is intentionally welcoming, bilingual, and relationship-centered.



In her final year as SummerQuest Director, Aspen Ives shared, the goal is for every student to “be part of the VMS community and feel welcome here.”

Over the years, SummerQuest has created opportunities that ripple outward, with former participants later becoming VMS students and SummerQuest staff members.

Setting the Table

Alpine Bank has also helped VMS deepen its commitment to connection through Longer Tables, which the bank has supported for the past two years. Inspired by the belief that “leaders set tables,” the initiative invites students, faculty, families, and community members to gather around a shared meal and engage in meaningful conversation. In a world where isolation and division can feel increasingly common, Longer Tables reminds students that leadership begins with hospitality, deep listening, and making space for others. The school's participation in Colorado's statewide 150 Tables Across Colorado movement extended that spirit of belonging even further, bringing students and teachers together shoulder to shoulder at one long table to celebrate community.

Beginning in this past '25-'26 school year, Alpine Bank also supported At the Table with Dr. King, an interactive performance that engages students in the history and ongoing relevance of the Civil Rights Movement through music, poetry, historical footage, and conversation. The experience encourages students to reflect on courage, humility, service, and the responsibility each person has to embrace new perspectives and contribute to a more just and compassionate world. It is a natural extension of VMS's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day “day on” of service, when students put those values into action throughout the Eagle County community.

The Power of Belonging

Taken together, these programs create a continuous cycle of trust, empathy, and service. The impact isn't felt just on our campuses, but in living room neighborhoods and local organizations throughout the valley.

We are deeply grateful to Alpine Bank for 25 years of steadfast partnership. By investing in programs like SummerQuest, Longer Tables, and At the Table with Dr. King, they are helping cultivate an Eagle County where every young person feels seen, valued, and genuinely welcome.



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Your Philanthropy at Work:

A Letter on Purpose, Choice, and Shared Joy

Early in my career, I heard an insight about philanthropy that has stayed with me: the true measure of a gift is not only what it accomplishes, but also the joy it creates for the person who gives it. At its best, philanthropy is reciprocal. It should feel as meaningful to the giver as it is transformative for the institution.

That principle remains an important part of how I think about philanthropy at Vail Mountain School. Giving is not simply about meeting an annual goal. It is a personal choice to invest in a community you value and to play a part in its future. Because every person's connection to Vail Mountain School is unique, the ways our community chooses to show up are as varied as the motives behind them.

No two donors make that choice for the exact same reason.

Some of you are drawn to the immediate, vibrant energy of our community gathering together—like swapping the ballroom out again for a ranch at this year's Gala, Revel at the Ranch, dancing to the Shakedown Family Band, and raising over \$600,000 to fuel transformative student experiences.

Others find their “why” in supporting the people who shape our children every day. Look at this year's Paddle Raise: your generosity directly funded our athletics program, including increasing coaches' salaries, and gave our faculty Renewal and Restoration grants to aid our teachers in taking care of themselves as they take care of their children.

For many, giving is about collective momentum. Reaching 80% parent participation and significantly surpassing our \$400,000 VMS Fund goal, unlocking a series of matches in the process, wasn't just a win for our budget. It was a statement of shared pride from parents, alumni, and faculty alike, supporting everything from flexible tuition to experiential education.

And then there are those who choose to look far down the trail. Through major gifts and lasting endowments, including new support for student scholarships, Emily's Fund, and Learning Elevated, generous families are helping ensure that the opportunities we value today will be here for students we have not yet met.





VIEW THE GALA
PADDLE RAISE
VIDEO:



Every single one of these choices stems from a different personal motivation, yet they all land in the same place: strengthening the foundation of Vail Mountain School.

Thank you for choosing to support VMS. Thank you for finding your own personal reason to give. And thank you for helping to sustain a culture of generosity that strengthens our school today and creates opportunities for generations to come.

With sincere gratitude,

Director of Advancement



The Hummingbird Society: *Vail Mountain School's Grandparents*

Celebrating Connection Across Generations

This year, Vail Mountain School welcomed grandparents into a new community created especially for them: the Hummingbird Society. Inspired by the hummingbirds that inhabit the Valley throughout the summer months, the Society celebrates the energy, warmth, and grace grandparents bring to VMS and creates opportunities to connect with their grandchildren's experience, engage with the school, and build relationships with one another.

Throughout its inaugural year, the Hummingbird Society brought grandparents together through special events, shared moments on campus, and opportunities to experience their grandchildren's education. Their wisdom, encouragement, presence, and generosity strengthen the connections at the heart of the VMS community.

That connection has also been expressed through extraordinary generosity. In its first year, Hummingbird Society donors contributed \$1.1 million to Vail Mountain School, including gifts to our Learning Elevated Strategic Plan, supporting the programs, people, and experiences that help our students learn, grow, and thrive.

A Legacy Takes Flight

One year. Countless moments. A lasting impact.

Every VMS grandparent has joined the Hummingbird Society and has helped strengthen the VMS community. Whether through participation, connection, or giving, their involvement reflects a shared belief in our students and the enduring value of a Vail Mountain School education.

We are deeply grateful to the grandparents who have embraced this community and continue to connect, engage, and invest in the future of VMS—today and for generations to come.

Extraordinary Gifts

Among these generous grandparents are members of the Diamond Circle, whose transformational gifts represent an extraordinary investment in the future of Vail Mountain School. We are grateful for their vision and commitment to ensuring that the impact of a VMS education continues for generations to come.

With gratitude to our Diamond Circle grandparents:

Sidney and Don Childress
The Corrigan Family
Margaret Elliott
Susan and Samuel Fruscione
Georgia Wall and Don Gogel

To see the full extent of our Hummingbird Society donors, please look at our annual listing starting on page 34.

The Hummingbird Society
**A YEAR IN
REVIEW**

290 *Current Hummingbird Society
Grandparent Households*

3 *New Hummingbird
Society Events*

3 *Hummingbird
Newsletters Sent*

70% *Engagement in Hummingbird
Society Newsletters*

4 *Letters of Wisdom
Opportunities*

90 *Letter of Wisdom
Participants*

3 *Hummingbird Society
Advisory Members*

\$67K *Grandparent Giving in
2024–25*

\$1.1M *Grandparent Giving in
2025–26*

25 *New Grandparent
Families Invested in VMS*



Our Supporters

We are tremendously grateful to the following individuals, businesses, and organizations that have supported the school either financially or through in-kind gifts between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026. VMS alumni are listed with their graduation year, VMS former students are listed with ('FS), and donors in blue represent members of our Hummingbird Society.

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*Are representative of donors who have made a pledge for the upcoming years.





Thank You for Your Generosity!

VMS Fund:	\$668,447
Gala Total \$ Raised:	\$647,096
Scholarship \$ Raised:	\$2,267,225
Community Partners:	\$7,000
SummerQuest Gifts:	\$7,025
Restricted Gifts/Pledges:	\$4,911,850
Emily Franciose Outdoor Learning Fund:	\$390,097
Total \$ Raised:	\$8,898,739

**These totals include any new pledges that were made within the 2025-2026 school year.*

Board of Trustees & Parent Volunteers

We extend our deepest gratitude to the numerous volunteers who dedicated their time, passion, and commitment to Vail Mountain School by serving on committees and parent volunteer groups throughout the 2025-2026 school year.

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Ways of Giving

Every gift counts. Every student benefits.

At Vail Mountain School, every gift, no matter the size, makes a difference. Your generosity fuels our teachers' creativity, powers student discovery, and sustains the experiential, K–12 education that defines VMS.

Giving to VMS is about more than supporting a school; it's about investing in a community that shapes ethical, curious, and kind young people. Students who go on to make a difference in the world.

Vail Mountain School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (Tax ID #84-0533775). Your contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

MAKE A GIFT
ONLINE



Cash Gifts

The simplest way to make an impact. Contributions made by cash, check, or credit card directly support the daily work of teaching and learning at VMS. You can also pledge a gift and spread payments throughout the year to fit your giving goals.

Give Online via Credit Card

Make a fast and secure gift using our online giving form. This form also allows you to set up convenient monthly, quarterly, or annual recurring gifts.

Mail a Check

Make payable to Vail Mountain School and mail to: Attn: Colleen Davis, Director of Advancement, Vail Mountain School, 3000 Booth Falls Road, Vail, CO 81657

Make a Cash Wire Transfer

Contact us for specific instructions to transfer funds directly.

Endowment Gifts

Gifts to the VMS Endowment create lasting strength. They help sustain financial aid, support exceptional educators, and preserve the school's commitment to accessibility for generations to come.

Matching Gifts

Many employers will match charitable contributions, sometimes doubling or even tripling your impact! Check with your company's HR department or online giving portal to see if your employer participates.

The VMS Gala

Join us each spring for an unforgettable evening of community celebration. Gala sponsorships, ticket sales, and auction proceeds fund essential initiatives.

Appreciated Assets

Donating stocks or other appreciated assets is a tax-smart way to make a charitable gift. You'll help VMS continue its mission while potentially realizing significant tax savings.

Memorial & Honorary Gifts

Celebrate or remember someone special with a tribute gift to the VMS Endowment. These donations create a lasting legacy that honors those who've inspired you.

Bequests & Planned Giving

By including Vail Mountain School in your will or estate plans, you help ensure that future generations of students experience the same transformative education that defines VMS today.



Eagle Valley Community Foundation: *Volunteer Group of the Year*

Here at Vail Mountain School, we are continually inspired by the ways our faculty and students embrace the school's commitment to experiential learning. Year after year, they find new ways to move learning beyond the classroom—applying their knowledge in meaningful settings while making a lasting impact on the community around them.

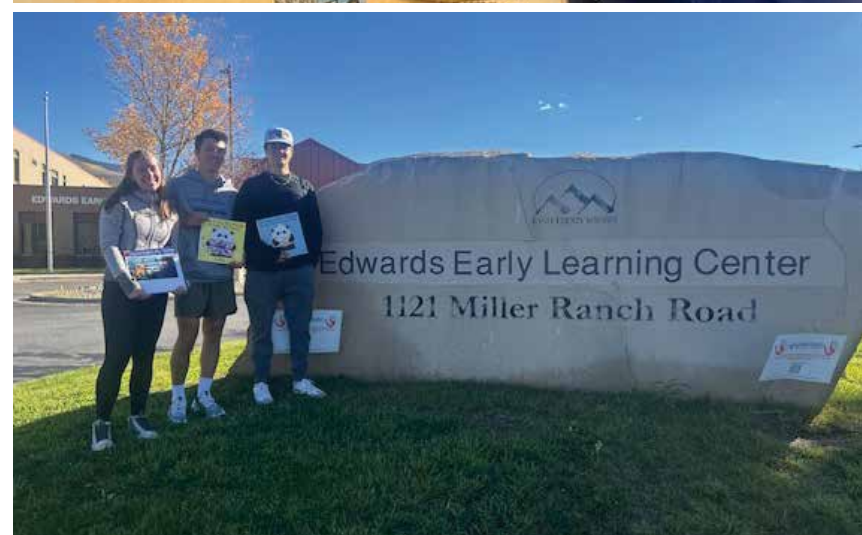
This year, that commitment was recognized by the Eagle Valley Community Foundation, an organization we have worked with for many years, which named Vail Mountain School its 2025 Volunteer Group of the Year. The award honors the school's outstanding dedication to service, experiential learning, and building meaningful connections throughout Eagle County.

In the words of the EVCF, Vail Mountain School's Advanced Spanish for Service Learning class, led by Upper School Spanish teacher Angela Alonso, is "at the heart of this partnership." In a valley with a vibrant Spanish-speaking community, Alonso saw an opportunity to transform language learning from an academic exercise into an act of connection.

Rather than limiting Spanish to the classroom, students put their skills into practice through volunteer work with local organizations. They assist families at The Community Market, help Spanish-speaking residents navigate MIRA Health Fairs, and support community members as they access vital resources—all while developing confidence in a language they have spent years studying.

"The Health Fair was a fantastic experience," Alonso says. "Students helped run the event while interacting with Spanish-speaking attendees, registering them, giving directions, and sharing basic information. They felt proud to use their Spanish to make someone's day easier." It's in moments like these that the realization sets in that language is not just a skill, but a tool for human connection.

Experiential learning has taken students into classrooms as well. During a visit to the Early Learning Center in Edwards, students shared original Spanish stories they had written and illustrated, reading aloud to preschoolers and leading discussions that encouraged curiosity and imagination. The project challenged students to think creatively, communicate clearly, and discover how language can foster joy and belonging across generations.



These experiences do more than strengthen fluency. “Students gain confidence communicating with native speakers and deepen their understanding of the diverse community they live in,” Alonso says. “They strengthen their ability to empathize with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.”

While the Spanish class served as the catalyst for this year’s recognition, it reflects a culture of service found throughout the VMS community. Students, faculty, and families come together each year for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, partnering with local organizations on projects that honor Dr. King’s legacy through meaningful action. The school also partners with Eagle Valley Community Foundation’s REcover Program, donating excess school meals to The Community Market to reduce food waste while helping provide nutritious food to local families.

The award recognizes not only student volunteers, but the collective effort of an entire school community.

“We’ve also been so inspired by the involvement of the VMS Parent Group and families, reinforcing that this culture of service is truly shared across your entire school community,” wrote Ruth Anshutz of the Eagle Valley Community Foundation.

It is a fitting reflection of what experiential learning looks like at Vail Mountain School. Whether students are practicing Spanish with native speakers, reading stories to young children, serving neighbors through local nonprofits, or working alongside their families to strengthen the community, they are discovering that the most meaningful education happens when knowledge is paired with purpose. In doing so, they are not only becoming more capable learners—they are becoming thoughtful citizens whose impact extends far beyond the walls of the classroom.



Generations of Care: *Ellen Millard*

For Ellen Millard, returning to the Vail Valley to open her own naturopathic medical practice was more than a career milestone, it was a homecoming. As the founder of Streamside Healing Arts, Millard now cares for the same community that helped shape her, continuing a family legacy of healthcare while bringing her own holistic approach to wellness.

Unlike many who enter medicine after witnessing tragedy or illness firsthand, Millard's inspiration came from a place of inspiration and hope. Watching her grandfather remain active, curious, and joyful into his late nineties challenged her understanding of what healthcare could be. "He is still skiing at 97 years old," she says. "Seeing what healthy aging could actually look like made me wonder not just how we treat disease, but how we help people live vibrant, fulfilling lives for as long as possible."

That question followed her beyond the classroom. While studying abroad in Ecuador, Millard experienced a culture where nutrition, herbal medicine, fasting, and a close relationship with nature were integrated into daily life. The experience transformed her perspective on medicine, reinforcing her belief that healthcare should focus not only on treating illness but on creating the conditions for people to thrive.

Returning to the Vail Valley felt like a natural next step. The mountains that shaped her childhood also shaped her philosophy of medicine, rooted in the belief that time outdoors, movement, and a vibrant lifestyle are essential components of well-being. Opening Streamside Healing Arts allowed her to bring those values into her work while serving the community she has always called home.

The practice itself carries deep personal significance. Millard's grandfather once cared for patients in the same building, followed later by her mother. Today, she is the third generation of her family to practice healthcare in that space. "Continuing my family's legacy of serving the Vail Valley is both a privilege and a responsibility that I cherish every day," she says.

As she builds her practice, Millard is motivated by creating a different kind of patient experience, one centered on listening, curiosity, and whole-person care. Rather than reducing patients to symptoms or diagnoses, she hopes Streamside Healing Arts becomes a place where people feel genuinely seen and supported. Looking ahead, she envisions expanding the practice into a collaborative healing center that brings together multiple practitioners and approaches under one roof, helping patients not only recover from illness but also build healthier, more connected lives.

Many of the principles that guide Millard today took root during her time at Vail Mountain School. She remembers a holistic education that extended well beyond academics, where

outdoor experiences, athletics, and a close-knit community worked together to shape both character and perspective.

Among the educators who left a lasting impression was volleyball coach Mr. Garvey, who taught lessons that continue to guide her today. Through athletics, she learned teamwork, leadership, and the importance of pursuing goals with "intention, grit, and passion."

The school's emphasis on curiosity also proved foundational. Millard credits programs like Shoulder-to-Shoulder, a partner program for Upper School students to gain hands-on leadership skills, with encouraging her to always ask why, a habit that now defines her work as a physician. For example, it's not only *what can we do about diseases?* but *why do we get them in the first place?* Whether caring for patients or building a business, she believes meaningful progress begins by remaining open to learning and willing to adapt. "Meaningful things rarely happen in a perfectly straight line," she reflects. Building a career, caring for patients, and raising a family have all required resilience and a commitment to continual growth.

When asked what advice she would offer today's VMS students, Millard encourages them to embrace exploration rather than feeling pressured to follow a predetermined path. She recommends studying abroad, pursuing experiences outside of academics, and trusting that unexpected detours often lead to the greatest opportunities. Looking back, transferring colleges, a decision that once felt like failure, ultimately became one of the most important turning points in her life.

Above all, she encourages students to appreciate the community surrounding them. "The education is incredible," she says, "but the relationships, experiences, and sense of place are equally valuable." Whether graduates ultimately build lives across the world or, like Millard, find themselves returning home, she believes the values cultivated at Vail Mountain School remain a lasting foundation, one that continues to guide both her life and her work serving the community that first inspired her.



Theatre: *Finding Your Voice and Your Place*

At Vail Mountain School, we believe education is about more than what students learn in a classroom. It is also about helping young people discover who they are, find their voice, develop confidence, and learn how to contribute to a community. Our theatre program provides a wonderful setting for all of this to happen.

Theatre asks students to do something that can be both exciting and uncomfortable: step forward and take a risk. Whether they are performing on stage, building a set, learning choreography, running lights, or supporting a castmate, every student has an important role to play. Through that shared experience, students learn to trust one another, listen, persevere, and recognize that what they contribute matters.

We are especially fortunate to have the Peter Abuisi Theater as a place for this work. It is a beautiful facility, but what makes it special is what happens inside it. It is a place where students are encouraged to try something new, make mistakes, grow more comfortable in their own skin, and celebrate the accomplishments of their peers.

In the fall, Upper School students brought *Little Women* to the stage. The students chose a story centered on family, resilience, independence, and growing up, and spent months working together to bring it to life. With 11 actors and seven backstage crew members, the production demonstrated that theatre is not simply about the people in the spotlight. Every contribution matters.

In the spring, more than 40 Upper School students came together for *Cinderella*. Actors, musicians, stagehands, and designers worked for months toward a common goal. Along the way, they developed skills, friendships, and a deeper sense of

belonging. As one senior reflected, the time spent together helped students build trust and new friendships both on and off the stage.

Our Middle School students had a similar opportunity with *Matilda the Musical*. Forty-seven students in grades 6–8 participated in the production, which was intentionally selected to offer a meaningful opportunity for every student. Some found their voice through a solo or speaking role; others contributed through the ensemble or behind the scenes. Each had a chance to step forward and shine.

This is the power of theatre in a school. It brings together students with different interests, experiences, personalities, and strengths and asks them to work toward something they cannot accomplish alone. It creates community.

And, perhaps most importantly, it gives students practice taking healthy risks. Each time a student walks onto a stage, tries a new role, speaks in front of an audience, or shares an idea with the group, they are building confidence. That confidence extends well beyond the theatre.

The final performance is certainly something to celebrate. But the greater accomplishment is the growth that happens along the way: students becoming more comfortable with themselves, learning to rely on one another, discovering new strengths, and understanding the value of contributing to something larger than themselves.

That is why theatre is such an important part of the VMS experience. We are not simply preparing students for the next performance. We are helping prepare them for the many stages they will encounter throughout their lives.





LEADERSHIP

Responsibility, acting for the greater good, and ethical decision-making.



Board of Trustees Updates:

Connecting on Campus

Leadership at Vail Mountain School means looking beyond today's needs to shape the school's future. The Board of Trustees supports and promotes VMS's mission, vision, strategic goals, and policies, with a focus on long-range priorities and strategic issues. As part of that work, trustees also make time to experience the school's day-to-day life firsthand. During the biannual Trustee Visit Day this February, Board members spent a half-day on campus, attending home base, observing classes, breaks, and recess, meeting with members of the Academic Team, and enjoying the Middle School Science Fair. The goal was simple: to give our Trustees an experience of the "real life" of the school and our students.

Welcoming Newcomers

VMS was delighted to welcome three new trustees this past school year: Juan Carlos (JC) Hernandez Barraza, Adi Slifer, and Craig Cohn. For JC and Adi, joining the Board was a return to a community that helped shape them. Both are VMS alumni with deep ties to the Vail Valley, bringing their experiences back to the school in service of its future.

JC grew up in Eagle County and attended VMS for grades 9–12. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Counseling Psychology and Counseling, with a concentration in Multicultural Clinical Mental Health, and is now an Outpatient Behavioral Health Specialty Clinician at Vail Health Behavioral Health. His commitment to the Vail Valley brought him back to the community in 2022, where he remains dedicated to creating positive change.

Adi is a proud Vail native and VMS alumna who spent K–12 at the school. After earning her degree from Vanderbilt University and an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, she spent seven years on the Corporate Development team at DaVita Healthcare before returning to the Vail Valley. She now works at Slifer Smith & Frampton, honoring her father's legacy, and serves on the Vail Valley Foundation Board of Directors, while remaining active with the VMS Strategic Planning and Alumni Committees.

Craig Cohn was drawn to Vail by his passion for skiing and cycling, and has been part of the VMS community since his daughter, Ariana, began Kindergarten in 2018. His career in real estate development has spanned mountain resorts and healthcare, most recently as Chief Real Estate Development Officer for Vail Health. He has also served on several local community boards and committees including the Vail Chamber of Commerce.

For JC and Adi, joining the Board marks a meaningful full-circle moment, and they now accompany three other alumni of the school who are also current trustees—Pepper Etters '98, Meredith Rose '95, and Joe Hanlon '88. Alongside fellow new trustee Craig Cohn, they bring new perspectives and experiences to a community that was formative in their own lives. For JC and Adi, their service offers an opportunity to give back to the school that helped shape them and guide it forward. Together, the new trustees strengthen the board's ability to thoughtfully steward VMS in the coming years.



Juan Carlos (JC)
Hernandez Barraza



Adi Slifer



Craig Cohn



Women Supporting Women in the Outdoors

On any given path, the power of interacting with folks who have paved the way is immeasurable to the inspiration and determination of students, and at VMS we're curious about what happens when girls have the opportunity to learn directly from women who are leading, working, and making an impact in the mountains. What's highly likely is that these young women begin to see new possibilities for themselves.

In March, Vail Mountain School students joined the Gore Range Gravity Alliance and the women of Vail Ski Patrol for a Young Women's Day at Vail Mountain, a day built around hands-on learning, mentorship, and connection. The day was planned by 11th grade student and EmpowHER club leader, Bergen Jacob. The mission of the EmpowHER club is to "create an environment where girls can be their true selves without hesitation, find friends, and build confidence." It was a natural fit for Bergen to collaborate with the leaders of the Gore Range Gravity Alliance and the women of Ski Patrol to create this special opportunity.

Students shadowed professional patrollers and gained a behind-the-scenes look at mountain operations, snow safety, emergency response, and careers in the ski industry. They asked questions, learned new skills, and experienced the knowledge and confidence that comes from working on the mountains. Perhaps even more meaningfully, students spent quality time with women who have built careers and communities in the outdoors, seeing firsthand that there is a place for them, too.

The experience reflects a larger goal shared by VMS and the Gore Range Gravity Alliance: creating opportunities for women to build skills, forge connections, and feel a stronger sense of belonging in the outdoors. When knowledge is shared from one generation of women to the next, the confidence passed on is palpable. It expands the possibilities for who gets to lead, work, adventure, and make an impact in the mountains.

The day also brought the VMS community together with local professionals and alumni, including VMS alumnae Cole Wilson '21 and Allie Gish '16, now members of Vail Ski Patrol.

Through experiences like Young Women's Day, students are discovering new ways to imagine themselves on the mountain and in the world: "When I see other strong girls and women having fun on the mountain and supporting each other, I see the outdoors as a collaborative environment where anything is possible."

With gratitude to the Gore Range Gravity Alliance, Vail Ski Patrol, VMS student leaders of the EmpowHER club, for making this opportunity possible, and Bergen for capturing the day.



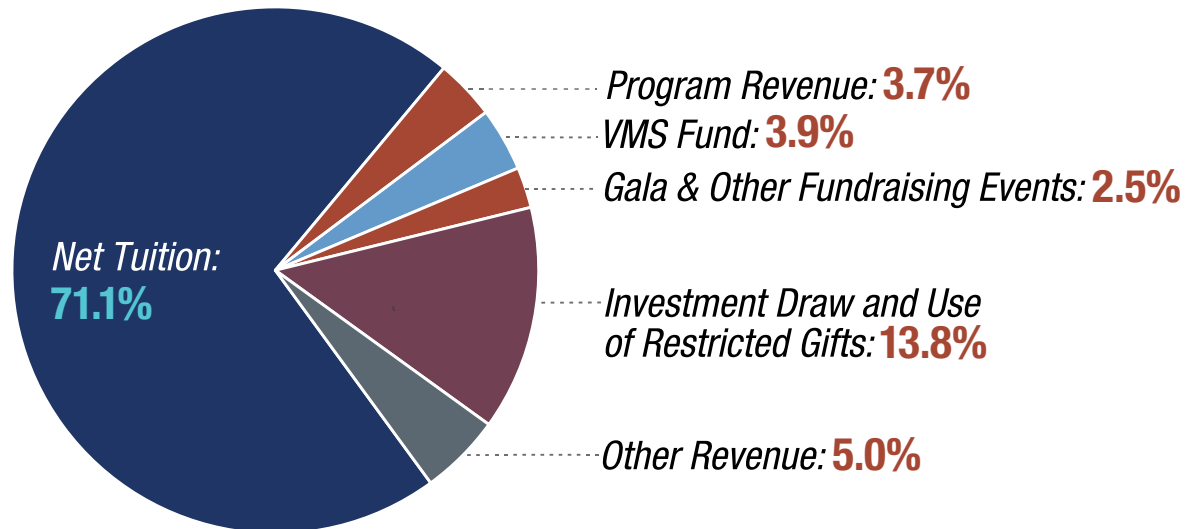
2025-2026 Operating Revenue

Tuition	\$13,193,829	
Less: Tuition Assistance	(\$3,245,160)	
Net Tuition	\$9,948,669	71.1%
Program Revenue	\$518,994	3.7%
VMS Fund	\$545,447	3.9%
VMS Gala and Other Fundraising Events	\$348,830	2.5%
Investment Draw and Use of Restricted Gifts	\$1,934,172	13.8%
Other Revenue	\$695,732	5.0%
Total Operating Revenue	\$13,991,844	100%

Leadership Gifts with Restrictions,
Including the Gala Paddle Raise and Grants

\$3,185,712

(All figures above are unaudited)

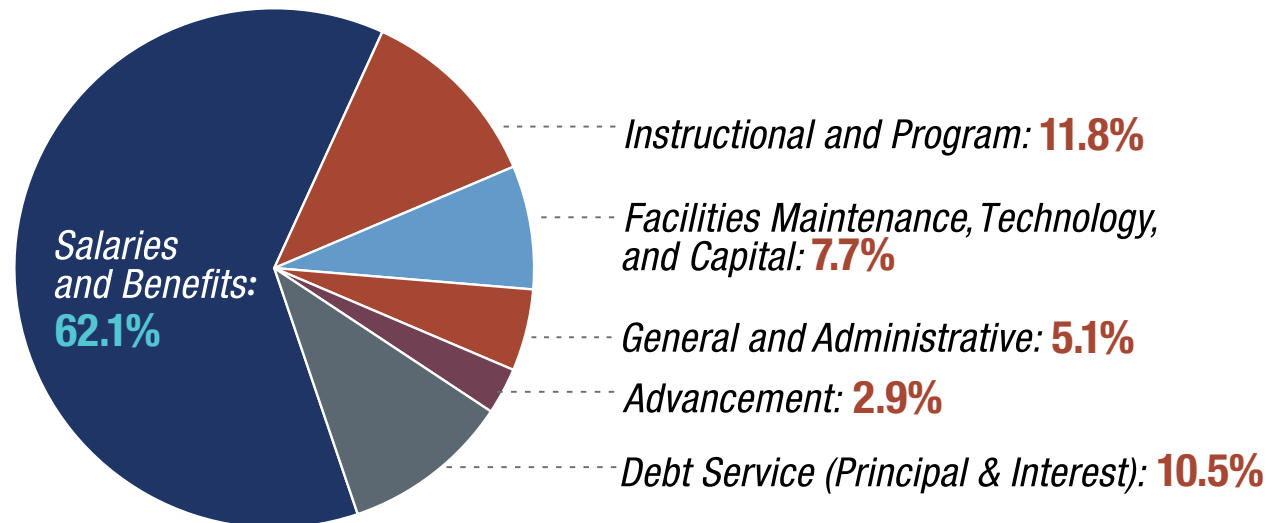




2025-2026 Operating Expenses & Capital

Salaries and Benefits	\$8,571,893	62.1%
Instructional and Program	\$1,626,511	11.8%
Facilities Maintenance, Technology, and Capital	\$1,057,006	7.7%
General and Administrative	\$702,683	5.1%
Advancement (Fundraising and Marketing)	\$398,005	2.9%
Debt Service (Principal and Interest)	\$1,444,038	10.5%
Total Operating Expenses	\$13,800,136	100%

(All figures above are unaudited)



A New 5th Grade Tradition

After more than a decade of taking the 5th grade to Denver for their final Lower School trip, the VMS team took a fresh look at what this culminating experience could be. The goal wasn't simply to find a new destination but to create an experience that felt more connected to the way VMS students learn and to the values that shape their education: academic excellence, experiential learning, character building, and environmental stewardship.

So this year, the 5th grade traded the city for the mountains. In May, students headed to the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park for the first **5th Grade Summit: An Experiential Learning Adventure**, built around three key themes: **Explore. Wonder. Learn.**

"We embraced the opportunity to reimagine off-campus learning, aligning the experience directly with Vail Mountain School's values, our evolving curriculum, and our students' developmental needs," says Kristin Douthitt, Director of Lower School. The result was three days where 5th graders could step into the subjects they had been studying all year.

Students learned to read the forest around them during Animal Tracking, using gait patterns, scat, marks, and footprints to understand how animals move through and interact with their environment. In Fire Ecology, they used fire boards to see how different types of fires burn and explored fire mitigation strategies, including examining evidence of past fires around the YMCA grounds and studying tree cookies. Outdoor Living Skills introduced students to wilderness survival, from learning how to prevent getting lost and what to do if they do, to practicing how to build a shelter in the event of an unexpected night in the woods. And at Guided Campfire, students gathered to sing, watch skits, listen to campfire stories, and, of course, make some s'mores.



Working through wire walks, rope swings, and problem-solving challenges, the low ropes course required students to communicate, trust one another, and figure things out together. They also had plenty of time to simply enjoy the experience, from sharing meals and bunking together to spending time outside and ending one evening with a neon roller disco.

For the teachers, the Summit was a chance to bring several pieces of the 5th grade curriculum together in one place. For the students, it was a chance to learn in a completely immersive way and to experience their class as a community before making the transition to Middle School.

The change from Denver to Estes Park was ultimately about more than changing the scenery. It was about creating a summit that felt unmistakably VMS: curious, active, connected to the natural world, and willing to try something new, and it gave the 5th grade a culminating experience that fostered more direct connection to their curriculum, their surroundings, and their classmates.





ENVIRONMENT

Discovering a sense of place in the natural world and responsible stewardship.



Rivers & Literature Course

Water is often treated as a scientific or political subject. In Vail Mountain School's senior seminar *Rivers & Literature* it is also approached as a literary, cultural, and deeply personal one.

Taught by Laurie Mortensen over the course of a semester, students examine humanity's relationship with rivers through novels, essays, and creative nonfiction while studying the history, ecology, and politics of water in the American West. Those conversations begin outside of the classroom during a four-day expedition on Utah's San Juan River, where students are asked to observe, write, and consider their own relationship to the landscapes they move through. Exploring the topic both physically and metaphorically, the course asks students to think critically about what it means to live alongside rivers and, ultimately, be responsible for them.

The culmination of the course is the River Guide, a collaborative publication created entirely by the students. Bringing together writing, artwork, photography, and reflection from across the semester, the guide serves as both a final project and a record of the students' evolving understanding of rivers and their relationship to the natural world.

The collection includes a range of creative forms, each offering a different lens through which students explored place and personal experience. In their prose poems, students focused on moments of observation and reflection that shaped their understanding of themselves. Inspired by David James Duncan's concept of "River Teeth," they examined the experiences, memories, and influences that form the core of who they are. Other sections, including Patagonia stories, myths and legends, and humorous stories, asked students to find meaning in small experiences and consider how storytelling can shape the way we understand the world around us.

Many students were surprised by not only what they learned about rivers and literature, but by what they learned about themselves. The student reflections following the course were truly moving, showing just how impactful it became, with one student even sharing this was the best high school class they'd ever taken. For others, the experience strengthened a sense of stewardship of this land rooted in creative expression and self reflection. It's obvious that this seemingly unlikely connection, of Rivers and Literature, became a perfect learning ground for introspection and growth for last year's senior class.

“ I understood the ecological importance of water, but this class has taught me how water is deeply connected to culture and literature, while making me continuously more aware of how fragile our water systems are.”

~ Declan

“ I learned that reflection doesn't always come from dramatic moments, but from noticing small details and allowing them to carry weight ... More broadly, this course taught me to slow down. I tend to look for structure, clarity, and answers, both in school and in writing. Many of the readings and discussions didn't offer clean conclusions, and I learned to be more comfortable sitting with uncertainty.”

~ Harrison

“ Each piece taught me something new. Whether it was to write honestly even when it's uncomfortable, blending humor and seriousness to create what matters to me, finding the physical detail first, then putting meaning on it, or finally letting the unknown stay unknown without needing to solve it.”

~ Grant



QR CODE TO FINAL PROJECT—
CLASS RIVER GUIDE



“It has made me more aware of the state of our rivers, more passionate about saving them, and more connected to what I love.”

~ Kayla

“Application is a huge factor for me; if I do not understand the use of learning topics, it’s hard for me to enjoy a class. The River and Literature class used both relevance and creativity, allowing me to feel excited to write and wonder about the book we were reading since these stories were so close to home.”

~ Izzy

“Overall, this course has changed my perspective on rivers and landscapes. At first, I started out not being passionate about rivers and their fragility, but now I care about them. I discovered that I can actually enjoy writing things that I am passionate about. I like to write when given full freedom and a topic I want to write about; this class has taught me that. I like to write beautiful pieces of work; I just need the opportunity to do it.”

~ Robby

Snow Science:

8th Grade Curriculum Update

In most classrooms, science begins with a textbook. At VMS, the importance is placed in lived experience and experiential learning. With the incredible landscape that Vail has to offer this means we're out in the mountains.

Each year, on a cold winter morning, 8th graders embark on telemark skis, making their way toward a high-alpine hut, leaving the familiar rhythm of school behind. The hike is demanding, packs are heavy, and the air is thin, but it will go on to be one of the most impactful educational experiences they will have.

Beneath their feet lies one of Colorado's most complex natural systems, a living laboratory where chemistry, physics, environmental science, leadership, and teamwork converge.

For more than three decades, Snow Science has been a defining part of the Middle School experience at Vail Mountain School. What began in the 1990s, after faculty member Brett Falk completed an avalanche safety course and was eager to implement some of his learnings, has grown into one of the school's signature examples of experiential education: learning that moves beyond observation and asks students to engage fully with the world around them.

The curriculum starts in the classroom, where students explore the science behind snowpack formation, water's physical properties, temperature gradients, and phase changes. However, it's during the annual three-day 8th-grade hut trip, where they work alongside backcountry safety professionals to study snow conditions firsthand, when those concepts become tangible.

Rather than reading about the landscape of the mountains, students analyze it. They learn how to identify layers within the snowpack by digging snow pits, practice beacon-and-probe rescue techniques, and evaluate terrain, all at high elevation. It's science with immediate relevance.

Colorado's backcountry offers extraordinary opportunities, but it also demands knowledge and respect. By understanding the hidden dynamics beneath the snow's surface, students gain practical skills that can help them make informed decisions in the mountains while developing a deeper appreciation for the alpine environment that surrounds them every day.

The program reflects Vail Mountain School's broader philosophy of experiential education: a cycle of intentional challenge, reflection, and application that transforms lived experiences into lasting learning. Faculty often describe this process through the school's experiential learning cycle. Students first **prepare**, setting goals and building foundational knowledge before heading into the field. Once outdoors, they **actively engage**, asking questions, collecting observations, and solving real problems.





Afterward, they **reflect** on what they experienced, connect those discoveries to prior learning and their broader understanding of the world, and ultimately **apply** those lessons beyond the classroom. Snow Science brings each stage of that cycle to life.

In the words of faculty member Steph Lewis, a strong advocate for experiential learning, “I view the Snow Science unit as the pinnacle of education. Not only is student learning facilitated across multiple environments, but there are also ample opportunities to address all aspects of the VMS mission. Students build community by problem-solving in their lab groups, connecting with peers on the trail to the hut, and washing dishes alongside classmates from different friend groups. They develop leadership skills by taking on various roles in lab groups and during the hut trip, supporting their classmates and keeping everyone organized. They cultivate character by pushing themselves through challenging hikes, managing homesickness, and navigating new social situations. Finally, they learn to connect with and appreciate the beauty and power of our wild backcountry environment.”

These are lessons that can't be replicated within four classroom walls.

By using the surrounding landscape as both classroom and teacher, Vail Mountain School creates experiences that are rooted in connection to the environment and rich with purpose. Students don't simply study the natural phenomena all around them—they become participants in it, developing a deeper understanding of the natural world and their place within it. Long after the snow melts, that's the lesson that remains.



Declan Cunningham: *First-Ever “Town of Vail Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” Stewardship Award*

For the past four years, Declan Cunningham has been asking the Town of Vail to take a seemingly simple yet consequential step: stop the sale of single-use plastic water bottles.

What began in an Environmental Club brainstorm session during his freshman year has grown into a sustained exercise in civic engagement, policy research, and persistence. Declan, a recent graduate of Vail Mountain School, has presented his case to the Vail Town Council multiple times, researched state and local plastic-reduction policies, connected with sustainability leaders and other advocates, and worked to build support for meaningful change.

His efforts were recently recognized when Declan received the first-ever **Town of Vail Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Stewardship Award**, honoring four years of hard work, research, and lobbying for the ban of single-use plastic water bottles in the community.

Declan's advocacy began with a deep dive into Colorado's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act and an examination of how communities such as Frisco and Breckenridge had approached plastic reduction. He also connected with local and regional leaders, including the mayor of Frisco, Mr. Hunter Mortensen, and the Town of Vail's sustainability director, Beth Markham, to better understand what policy change could look like in Vail. His research became the foundation for multiple presentations to the Town Council, where he made the case for eliminating the sale of single-use plastic water bottles and later, spearheaded by his co-presenter, other single-use plastic products.

His work has consistently gone beyond identifying a problem. In 2024, Declan made the case for action while also promising, with the support of our VMS environmental club, to help educate local businesses and residents about the issue. He highlighted the environmental impact of plastic waste, noting that only a small fraction is recycled, with much ending up as microplastics in our waterways; however, Declan has approached the issue not simply as an environmental problem. He posed the question of how local policy can create practical change. Declan tracked the progression of Vail's own plastic-reduction efforts, including the town's ban on Styrofoam cups and containers. He looked beyond Vail, speaking with former Frisco Mayor Hunter Mortensen and comparing plastic-reduction policies in Frisco and Breckenridge to understand what had worked in other mountain communities. His argument was straightforward: Vail has high-quality municipal water, making single-use plastic water bottles unnecessary, while the bottles that are used often become waste or break down into microplastics rather than being recycled. When the town did not immediately enact a ban, he kept showing up.

The Town of Vail Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Stewardship Award is a testament to Declan's diligence and leadership. Although they have not yet enacted a ban on the sale of single-use plastic water bottles, his persistence has helped move the conversation forward. For Declan, the award is recognition not of a finished campaign, but of what can happen when a student takes an idea seriously enough to keep pursuing it. His work demonstrates a central tenet of experiential learning at VMS: education does not have to end when the class does, turning research into action is possible at any age, and if you stay with an idea long enough, it can absolutely change the place you call home.



ALUMNI



CONNECTION



Our Newest Alumni

We are proud to welcome the Class of 2026 into our alumni community. As they begin their next chapters at colleges and universities across the country, we celebrate the many ways their VMS experiences will continue to shape who they are and how they contribute to the world. We look forward to staying connected and following all that they accomplish.

The Class of 2026 Matriculation List

- Cal Poly – San Luis Obispo
- Colorado Mesa University
- Cornell College
- Fashion Institute of Technology
- High Point University
- Middlebury College
- North Carolina State University
- Rollins College
- University College Dublin
- University of California – Berkeley
- University of Colorado – Boulder
- University of Denver
- University of Mississippi
- University of Virginia
- Wake Forest University
- Washington & Lee University



SAVE THE DATE
Alumni Winter Solstice Celebration
December 18, 2026



The Bell That Connects Us

The familiar sound of the bell outside Vail Mountain School rang across campus, calling back memories for one of the people most closely connected to its history.

The bell's donor, longtime Vail Valley resident and VMS parent, Rick Sackbauer, had stopped by campus and took a moment to ring it once again. For Rick, the bell represents far more than a piece of railroad history. It carries a family story that stretches across generations.

The bell originally belonged to Rick's grandfather, who received it upon his retirement as a train engineer. The family's initials remain inscribed on its top. When Rick was growing up, his father would ring the bell in the evening, and Rick could hear it from across the golf course, knowing it was time to come home for dinner.

Today, the bell has a permanent home at Vail Mountain School, connecting that family tradition to generations of VMS students and families.

The Sackbauer family has deep roots in the Vail Valley. Rick was one of the first managers of on-mountain restaurants and cafeterias, and he and his wife, Jan, a Vail ski instructor, raised their family in the community. Their daughters, Lucy and Mary, attended VMS, with Lucy graduating as a member of the Class of 2008. Rick and Jan's son, Tim who has Down syndrome, attended Battle Mountain High School because VMS was not able to offer the resources he needed, though he wanted to attend alongside his sisters.

For Rick, the family's connection to VMS is also deeply personal. The Sackbauer family was part of a close-knit group of parents and students, and Lucy's lifelong friendships began in preschool and continued through VMS. Recently, classmates from the Class of 2008 gathered in the Valley to celebrate Lucy at her baby shower, a reminder of the enduring connections formed during their years together at school.

Today, Lucy is a nurse in Sun Valley, Idaho, where she serves on a flight medical team. In a recent tragedy following a shooting in Twin Falls, Lucy was part of the crew that transported a critically injured victim by air to a trauma center in Salt Lake City. When the flight arrived, the medical team on the ground included her sister, Mary, who is also a nurse. A photograph captured the powerful moment the two sisters came together as part of the response.

For the Sackbauer family, it was another example of how life's paths can bring people together, even in the most unexpected circumstances.

Rick and Jan are now spending more time at home in Sun Valley to be closer to Lucy as she welcomes her first child. Yet, their family's story will continue to echo at Vail Mountain School every time the bell rings.

It is a story of family, friendship, service, and community. And thanks to the Sackbauer family's gift, the sound of that old railroad bell continues to carry across campus, connecting VMS to a legacy that began generations ago.



Mary is currently a Trauma Nurse at the University of Utah Hospital (Salt Lake City), working in the Emergency Department. She has been a nurse since 2021. Prior to that she worked in the Surgical ICU at the University of Utah hospital.

Lucy is a Flight Nurse for Air St. Luke's based in Ketchum, Idaho. She began this new role in October 2025. Air St. Luke's is a hospital-based air medical transport for St. Luke's Hospitals in Idaho. She has been a nurse since 2012.

A series of unfortunate events led to the good fortune of the two sisters getting to work together to take care of a patient. On August 1, 2026, there was a shooting at the In-N-Out Burger in Twin Falls, Idaho. Air St. Luke's was dispatched to the hospital in Twin Falls to be on standby for the transport of any patients who may need transport to a higher level of care. Lucy's team, also known as ASL 4, was assigned to a patient who needed to be transported to Salt Lake City for further management of her injuries sustained in the shooting. While in Twin Falls, she texted Mary (who was working Triage in the Emergency Department that day) and said that they were headed to Salt Lake City. They landed on the roof at the University of Utah hospital at 18:45—just 15 minutes before shift change and when Mary would be heading home. Mary and another staff member met them on the roof to help them bring the patient from the Helicopter to the Emergency Department. The patient had a positive outcome and the sisters were able to see and give each other a hug on the job!

Lucy is expecting her first baby, and a first for the Sackbauer family! She was 8 months pregnant on the day of this transport!



Alumni Class Notes

Class of 1976

Erik Brofos

I'm still here in Vail and representing the class of '76. My family is still mostly here as well. My daughter, Whitney Price, is an amazing wedding photographer and her husband, Brady, is a fireman for the Eagle River Fire Protection District. My wife, Joelle Hill, is all things HR at the Town of Avon and her kids are here and in Crested Butte. As for me, I work for a wonderful family that I've been associated with for over 40 years managing their properties in the county. I also just finished my 50th year with Vail Resorts this past winter where I still work part time as a ski instructor with the best guests on the planet. All in all, we are still a mountain family who likes all things outdoors.

Class of 1979

Tim McMahan

I continue practicing law at Stoel Rives law firm (40 years), where I am a senior partner, leading our western US renewable energy practice team. In April, I returned from 5 weeks of walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain. I recommend it, with all of its intensity and life changing questions, and few answers.

Class of 1990

Robert Ast

I have been living in Bainbridge Island, Washington for the last 23 years with my wife Deb. Our daughter, Hannah, is now a sophomore at DU, so we still make it back to Colorado a few times a year. I am currently the Emergency Department Medical Director as well as Chief of Staff for St. Michael Medical Center in Silverdale, Washington. I would love to hear from classmates or other Puget Sound area alumni from the late 80s/early 90s.

Class of 1993

Tom Boyd

Tom Boyd is an Eagle County Commissioner. He lives in Edwards with his wife, Renee, and two sons, Tyler and Alex.



Class of 1997

Tag Hopkins

I continue to live in Townsville, Australia with my wife, Melissa, and two daughters, Taitum and Marlo. I work as an Emergency and Retrieval Doctor here. Last year, my family toured around Colorado and went to Mesa Verde. This town is a beautiful place I hadn't visited since the 4th grade when on the Mrs. Rapson VMS class trip. What great memories! I miss Vail and VMS. Go Rangers!



Class of 2000

Aaron Fox

I live in Boomerang Beach, Australia with my wife and two young children. We miss the mountains but love the beach.



Class of 2003

Whitney Simmonds

Whitney Simmonds married Peter Joseph in April 2026 in a small ceremony near their home in Uxbridge, MA. Whitney continues to teach high school music at Nipmuc Regional High School in Upton, MA where she serves as the Director of Vocal & Choral Music, Electives Department Head, and teaches classes in choir, rock band, and music theory and composition.



Class Notes *(continued)*

Class of 2005

Sylvan Ellefson

I live in Edwards with my wife, Sarah, and our two boys, Ryder (9) and Aksel (7). We enjoy camping, mountain biking, Nordic skiing, and adventuring in the mountains we get to live in still. I run a property management company, Snø Property Management, and am currently transitioning to owner at Gore Range Montessori in Edwards that was formerly owned and run by VMS Alum Teacher and Board Chair, Kristin Tang. I still am fortunate enough to get to spend many of my Thursday evenings skinning, running, or mountain biking with much of the graduating class of 2005 and 2004.



Class of 2008

Lucy Sackbauer

Happily married living in Sun Valley, Idaho. I just started a new job as a Flight Nurse working for Air St. Luke's stationed here in Ketchum, Idaho. I get to work at the top of my license as an RN, responding to scene calls and transporting critical care patients between hospital facilities. Taking care of patients in the helicopter has been quite the adventure so far!



Class of 2010

Cynthia Edgerton

I finished my 4 years here at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs serving as the 10th Special Forces (Airborne) Veterinarian. My next assignment will be at the University of Minnesota completing a PhD in veterinary science focusing on equine cardiology.



Class of 2012

Misha Harrison Lubanski

Graduated as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 2022 from CSU. Completed additional internship and residency training at the University of Wisconsin and University of Florida to become a veterinary surgeon. Practicing at the University of Florida as a small animal surgeon (mostly dogs and cats).



Paco Holguin

Wife and I have a baby girl!

Class Notes *(continued)*

Class of 2015

Trevor Shelden

I studied Architecture and Environmental Design at CU Boulder, spent a semester abroad in Copenhagen, and continued playing soccer all four years. After graduating in 2019, I moved to southern California and spent the next several years working at architecture firms, designing high-end custom homes across California, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, Costa Rica, Thailand, and Dubai.

This past spring, I launched Shelden Studios, my own residential architecture and design firm based in Los Angeles and Breckenridge. I recently passed my licensing exams and became a licensed architect, a milestone I have been building toward since my senior project at VMS. The studio is currently working on projects in Manhattan Beach, Hood River Oregon, and a new custom home in Breckenridge.

This year, I was lucky enough to ski Japan with three other VMS alumni and attend a few US World Cup soccer games with my parents and three older brothers.



Class of 2018

Declan Rooney

Going into my third year living in Chicago! I changed firms last fall but remain in Consulting, and I've enjoyed traveling across the U.S. and to London to work with clients in the insurance industry. While I'm enjoying my time in Chicago, I always find my way west to ski, camp, and spend time with other alumni from the Class of 2018.



Class of 2019

Millie Zhu

I'm staying in LA after getting my Master's degree from USC last year, as I am now heading into my fourth year in this city! I started my marketing career in healthcare and couldn't be more grateful for the journey. I miss the VMS community and all the connections I made along the way!

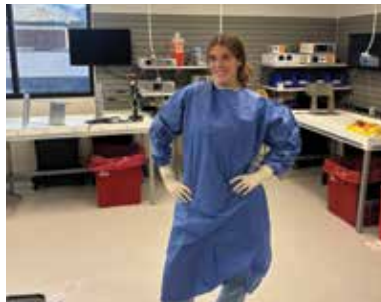


Class of 2020

Rachel Conley

For the past year, I have been working as a Research Assistant at the Steadman Philippon Research Institute, where I conduct clinical trials focused on osteoarthritis, muscle health, and postsurgical outcomes. I also lead hands-on labs and educational programs with local schools throughout the Vail Valley.

I recently applied to medical school and plan to matriculate in the summer of 2027. Outside of work, I have been enjoying life in Colorado, spending as much time as possible running, skiing, and exploring the mountains. This fall, I am excited to run the Boulder Marathon!



Class of 2021

Emma Ferer

This May I graduated from Colby College with a B.A. in Global Studies. I recently moved to NYC to start work at Findigs.



Emma Kate Burns

I graduated from USD with a Masters in Accounting in December and then started a job in Venture Capital accounting in San Francisco in January!

Class Notes *(continued)*

Cole Wilson

I completed my first winter as a ski patroller at Vail Mountain and I enjoyed it very much. I will be returning for my second winter with, hopefully, more snow! Every day I feel grateful that I get to work on the mountain where I enjoyed years of Ski Fridays. This summer I took a position as a research technician in the Steadman Philippon Research Institute's Center for Regenerative and Personalized Medicine. I studied the effect of an experimental drug on gene expression in osteosarcoma and chondrosarcoma cells.



Class of 2025

Chloe Demmler

I am honored to share that I have begun my internship with Alpine Bank's Wealth Management Team.

My first introduction to the Alpine Bank Team came when I presented my senior thesis, "Retweets and Returns: How Social Media Affects Investment Behavior," to a panel of experts. The support and feedback I received continue to pay dividends in my college experience. That research, backed by Alpine Bank and the Vail Mountain School Financial Committee, later led to my role as a Research Assistant with the University of Richmond's Finance Department.

A big thank you to Timothy Haley, Jacob Going, CFA, and Maggie Pavlik for the opportunity. A BIG thank you for the initial introduction to the Alpine Bank team that continues to pay dividends beyond the success of my senior project.

Finally, after a very successful year at URichmond, I will be attending USC in the fall at the Marshall School of Business. I look forward to making the most of what I am certain will be a formative experience.



Hayden Phillips

This summer, I've been working as a camp counselor at SOAR, an adventure program outside of Asheville, North Carolina, for kids with ADHD and learning differences. It's been a great experience, and I've learned so much about working with kids, being a leader, and getting outside of my comfort zone. I've met some great people, and it's been really fun to be part of a program that helps campers build confidence and try new things.

Faculty Update

Welcome, Boaz Charles Hartmann!

His family chose his name with the belief that "kindness is the greatest strength." We are so happy to welcome Boaz and his family to the VMS community. Welcome to the VMS family, Boaz!



KEEP IN TOUCH!
ALUMNI UPDATE FORM





VAIL MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

3000 BOOTH FALLS ROAD
VAIL, COLORADO 81657

