

# MODUS VIVENDI

*A Way of Life*

**FACULTY PROFILE: KENNY NORRIS**

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN  
CLASSICAL EDUCATION**

**COOKING UP KINDERGARTEN  
READINESS**

**THE BEAR CREEK  
SCHOOL MAGAZINE**

**WINTER 2025**



# MODUS VIVENDI

*Winter 2025*

*Modus Vivendi* is translated as "a way of life" or "a manner of living." The Bear Creek School seeks to develop individuals for whom the classical ideals of excellence in all things, love of learning, spiritual commitment, and self-discipline have become a way of life.

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*Modus Vivendi* is published twice a year by The Bear Creek School. If you are interested in writing for *Modus Vivendi* or have comments or questions regarding the publication, please contact us at [modusvivendi@tbcs.org](mailto:modusvivendi@tbcs.org).

*The mission of The Bear Creek School is to provide a high-quality, Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that will enable each student to become the individual God intends.*

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### ON THE COVER

Grade 6 students perform at the Christmas at Bear Creek Grades 5 and 6 Concert. Read more about the intentionality of Bear Creek’s band program on page 32. Photo by Cindy McCahill.

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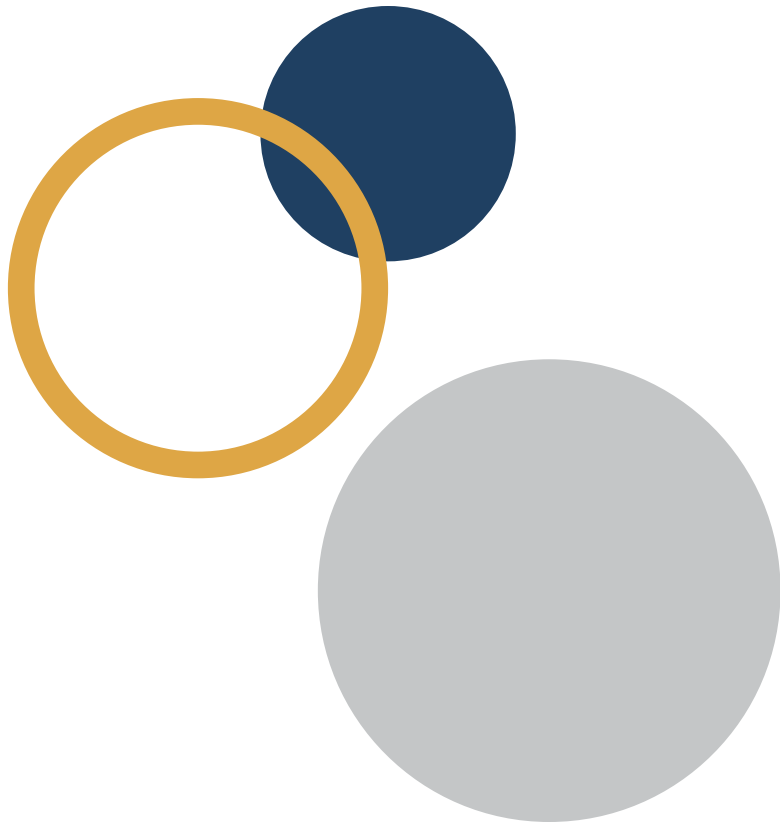
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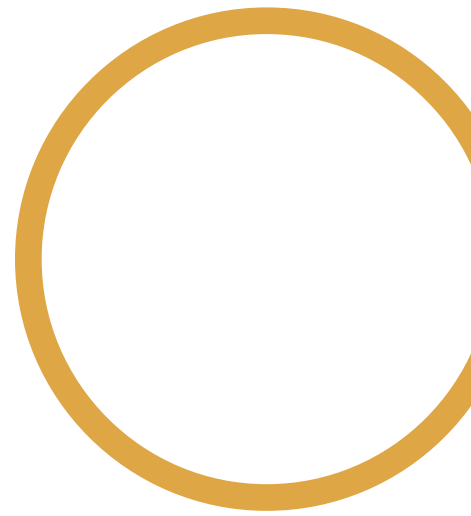
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## TYLER KOWAL

*Hear what Tyler is doing now*

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# MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMASTER

By Patrick Carruth

**ONE MIGHT  
THINK  
THAT A  
CHRISTIAN LIBERAL  
ARTS EDUCATION  
AND INNOVATION  
ARE AT ODDS WITH  
EACH OTHER, BUT  
THEY ARE NOT.**

The heart of a Christian liberal arts education is teaching students not just the goods of the mind with which to think, but, more importantly, teaching them how to think—to ultimately be critical and creative in the way they think.

The liberal arts tradition was an innovative idea in the ancient world and remains so in the modern world. The principle undergirding this methodology is the belief that virtue (defined as personal happiness, the good life, and a moral citizenry) is the purpose of education, rather than mechanical, technical, or occupational skills and knowledge.

The etymology of the phrase “liberal arts education”



encodes this perspective. "Education" is composed of Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes. The suffix *-ation* makes it a noun, but the heart of the word is found in the root *duc*, meaning “to lead,” and in the prefix *e-*, meaning “out or beyond.” Therefore, “education” means a “leading out from a beginning to an end.” Similarly, the Latin term, *liberalis* means “free” and *ars* means “art or principled practice.” Hence, a “liberal arts education” suggests “leading toward principled practices that free people to live virtuous lives.”

In ancient Greece, Plato thought it led from ignorance to enlightenment and produced a virtuous Republic. Aristotle believed it led to the contemplative temperate life and produced happy individuals. Medieval thinkers like Augustine believed liberal arts education had the power to restore and transform culture, as opposed to only training in occupational skills.

In the modern world, philosophers like John Dewey emphasized education was to serve a purely pragmatic end. In his work *Democracy and Education*, he writes, “We have just pointed out the futility of trying to establish the aim of education—some one final aim which subordinates all others to itself.” This statement undercuts the liberal arts view of the purpose of education. Dewey’s vision, which is the majority perspective in most schools today, replaces

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**THE BEAR CREEK SCHOOL  
SEEKS TO MODEL THAT REALITY  
BY HOLDING FIRM TO OUR  
VISION AND VALUES, WHILE  
REMAINING CREATIVE AND  
FLEXIBLE IN HOW WE DELIVER  
THE MISSION.**

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freedom with mechanical skills. He further suggests that with “the change from an oligarchical to a democratic society, it is natural that the significance of an education which should have as a result ability to make one’s way economically in the world, and to manage economic resources usefully instead of for mere display and luxury, should receive emphasis.”

Unlike the Greek philosophers and the Enlightenment and Modern theorists, the Scriptures define education as instruction that produces love through obedience, not secular virtue or vocational training.

The end of education is knowledge of the one true God and obedience to Him in all areas of life—from calculus to cooking, from biology to building churches, from history to handwriting, from literature to lunch, from Sunday through Saturday. As G. K. Chesterton reminds us, “The most important fact about the subject of education is that there is no such thing. Education is not a subject, and it does not deal in subjects. It is instead the transfer of a way of life.” A Christian liberal arts education is both traditional in its content and innovative in its purpose. The Bear Creek School seeks to model that reality by holding firm to our vision and values, while remaining creative and flexible in how we deliver the mission.

An example of innovative thinking at The Bear Creek School is our JanTerm program for students in grades 7 – 12. During JanTerm, students experience an expansion of our core curriculum and engage in classes which teach on myriad topics from grilling to dog training, from learning how to start and fund a business to understanding how logistics and supply helped win World War II in the Pacific. JanTerm allows for innovation and creativity beyond our liberal arts core curriculum.

At the same time of year, our fifth- and sixth-grade students engage in Immersion Weeks, which is an innovative program to help them dive deeper into the sciences and arts. Our fifth-grade students encounter a broad overview of scientific disciplines, ideas, and formulas to prepare them for our Science Fair. Our sixth-grade students spend two weeks exclusively diving into the world of Shakespeare, understanding

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**LIKE LATIN IN THE ANCIENT  
WORLD, THE LANGUAGES  
OF COMPUTERS ARE  
IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS  
TO UNDERSTAND, EVEN AT AN  
EARLY AGE.**

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Students learn to grill in an Upper School JanTerm class.

his context, history, and language, and receiving individualized instruction as they prepare to perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

We also consider computer programming important for students to learn in the modern world. Understanding how devices work, think, and are constructed helps explain their functionality and proper use. Like Latin in the ancient world, the languages of computers are important for students to understand, even at an early age. Computer programming also teaches critical thinking. Students are challenged to analyze problems, identify patterns, and find creative and efficient solutions. (Read more about computer programming in Lower School on pages 18 – 21.)

These are just a few examples of how we seek to think innovatively at The Bear Creek School while maintaining the heart of our mission: providing a high-quality Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that enables students to become the individuals God intends.

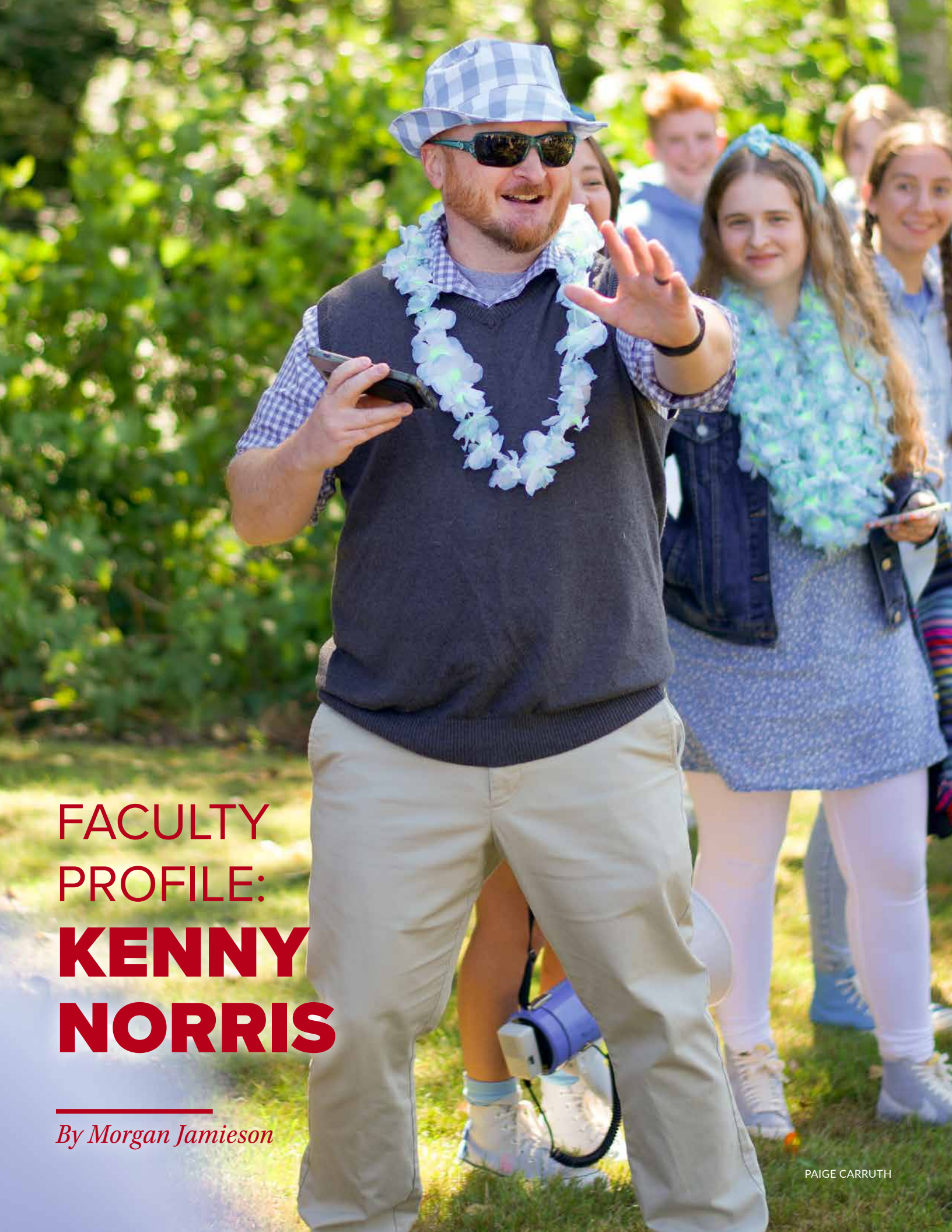


Grade 5 student displays her Science Fair project.



Grade 6 students rehearse *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.





FACULTY  
PROFILE:  
**KENNY  
NORRIS**

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*By Morgan Jamieson*

*Kenny Norris grew up in Carnation, Washington, the fifth generation on his family's farm. His ancestors founded both Redmond and Carnation, and he is a direct descendant of the Perrigo family.*

“If you go down to Perrigo Park in Redmond, you’ll find a bunch of black-and-white photos of local folks, and those are all my relatives,” Kenny describes. Growing up, he was a member of Carnation Clippers, his local 4-H club, and competed in dairy cow shows. In sixth grade, he qualified for State in the “Fitting and Showing” event which involved training cows to walk and pose in specific ways. “I was so bad at it,” he admits, “But my cow was apparently beautiful. I went to State on the strength of her merits, not the strength of my fitting and showing.” At the King County Fair in Enumclaw, he remembers chasing after his heifer Holla who would slip out of her show collar and prance around the fairgrounds. “We had to wear all white. It was supposed to prove how clean our cows were because if you rubbed against them you wouldn’t get dirty. Looking back, that sounds so bizarre,” he laughs. “That was a part of my childhood.”

It was in middle school that Kenny first became interested in English. His eighth-grade English teacher Mr. Jorgensen inspired what would become a life-long appetite for understanding writing. “Middle school can be tumultuous, and [Mr. Jorgensen] was awesome about meeting us in our tumult and calling us to a higher bar.” Kenny remembers he got in trouble once after writing a paper on *The Hobbit*. “I hit Shift+F7 and found the word ‘clandestine.’ I changed every ‘secret’ in the essay to ‘clandestine.’ I turned it in, thinking I had found the perfect word,” he laughs. Two weeks later, in the middle of class, Mr. Jorgensen asked Kenny to define clandestine. He couldn’t. As a consequence, Kenny had to write the word and its definition a hundred times. Reflecting, he states, “As much as that sounds like punishment, to me it was more of an affirmation: There are



COURTESY PHOTO

Kenny and his cow Holla winning the “Type” category at 1989’s King County Fair

standards. Excellence means expanding your knowledge base and being held accountable, not just relying on technology.”

To Mr. Jorgensen’s credit, though he set Kenny on a path of pursuing writing, he couldn’t answer every question that Kenny had. Kenny describes, “I can remember, as an eighth grader, wanting to understand the intersection of my faith with what I was learning in [Mr. Jorgensen’s] classroom in particular. But he wasn’t a believer, and he couldn’t help me with that intersection.” Growing up in a spiritually divided home, there was a tension which became a catalyst for Kenny to understand his faith himself. He reflects, “I had a lot of things going on in life as a middle schooler, and I think that is a decisive point in life. That is when I doubled down on my faith and got serious about studying the Bible and following Christ. Not just going through the motions.”

Kenny did find some answers, thanks to a few great mentors including his youth pastor Scott Becker. Scott encouraged ninth-grade Kenny to explore his faith by reading deep theological works and

*Over the course of his 25-year teaching career, Kenny has taught a wide range of subjects including journalism, philosophy, debate, and English in every grade level from seventh to twelfth.*



Ryan Summers on bass, Kenny on electric guitar, and Jared Mack singing Bon Jovi's "Living on a Prayer" at the talent show during Upper School I-Fest in 2024

by memorizing entire books of the Bible. Kenny recalls, “[Scott] would say, ‘You should read some Bonhoeffer.’ So, I read some Bonhoeffer. Or, ‘Hey guys, this summer we’re going to memorize 1 John.’ [Scott] would set up these carrots for us: ‘If you want to go on the mission trip, you have to memorize *this* book of the Bible,’ and so, we did.” Kenny continues, “That kind of intentionality he had, to have us reading theology and wrestling with these ideas and then bring us back to scripture, was huge.”

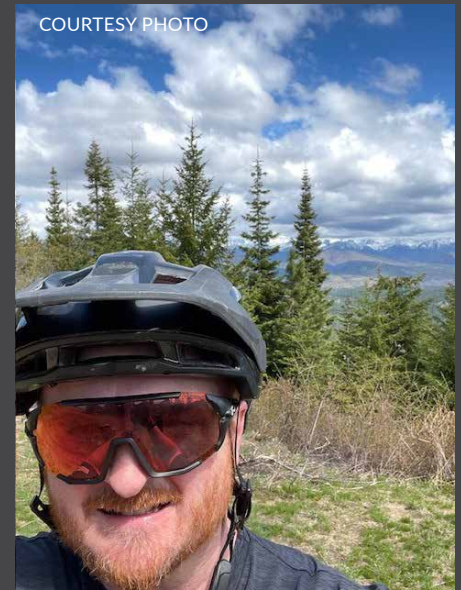
Kenny graduated from high school to attend Northwest University in Kirkland, WA, where he met his wife Jenne in a Biblical Interpretation class. Together, they have two children, Thad '22 and Rory '25. After Kenny earned his teaching degree in 1999, he began working at Cedar Park Christian School. Kenny describes how, despite his stronger aptitude for English, during his first year at Cedar Park Christian, “they needed math teachers.” To that end, Kenny confesses, “I was not good. Being an English teacher, I renamed some of the math techniques.” For example, instead of explaining FOIL (the acronym for using the distributive property),



Kenny on guitar at Eastridge Church's 2024 Christmas Concert



Kenny and Phil Higley on a hike with Bear Creek students to Spider Gap



Kenny's mountain biking trip in the Teanaways near Cle Elum

he called it the rainbow method, “because you draw ‘rainbows’ from the different things in the two parenthetical pieces of the equation,” he says with a laugh. “My students *really* liked that name. So much so that the next year, the math teacher who inherited my students was not happy.” Apparently, while illustrative and memorable, the rainbow metaphor is not as mathematically helpful as FOIL’s ‘first, outside, inside, last’ mnemonic.

After five years at Cedar Park Christian, Kenny was looking for an opportunity to teach that fit better with what he had been learning on his own about classical education. “I had dipped my toe in rhetoric and the appeals in the pursuit of how to help kids write better,” Kenny explains, “and [Bear Creek] really piqued my interest in some of the things that I had been exploring on my own to become a better teacher.” In 2005, Kenny joined the Bear Creek faculty to teach rhetoric to Upper School students.

Over the course of his 25-year teaching career, Kenny has taught a wide range of subjects including journalism, philosophy, debate, and English in every grade level from seventh to twelfth. But it was rhetoric that sparked a deep, ongoing journey for him to explore and teach the art and science of writing. Kenny especially enjoys seeing students experience those “ah-ha!” moments as they begin to

develop their own writing styles. “We often think of ‘style’ as just writing, but when you can recognize your style of interacting with the world, it tends to open up everything.” Kenny recalls former Bear Creek student Jake Imam ’12, a Marshall Scholar and Oxford graduate. He still remembers Jake’s early essays when he was starting to realize the power of metaphor to communicate his ideas. “I taught him so long ago,” Kenny says. “When kids write really well, and years later I can remember it like that...it is like bedrock for my teaching.”

Over his 20-year tenure, Kenny credits The Bear Creek School with providing a great framework to explore theological ideas, receive peer mentorship, and hone his craft. “Here, there are so many people who are pastors or former pastors and who hold master’s degrees in theology or are pursuing them,” Kenny describes. “As a result, we constantly engage in ecumenical, healthy, iron-sharpens-iron conversations about faith.” In his teaching role, Kenny has found a wellspring in the Bear Creek curriculum that continually deepens for him with time. “Working in the humanities, when you teach a rich text over and over again, it challenges you in new ways including your faith journey.” Reflecting on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he describes, “I am always kind of taken aback by the fact that Twain



Kenny with his climbing buddies near Mt. Bachelor in Bend, Oregon



Kenny's base camp for summing Mt. Baker in 2017

was a self-professed ‘enemy of Christianity’ for some things that happened early in his life, yet if you read *Huck Finn* with the satirical lens he intends, it is such a Christian text.” Similarly, Kenny describes the timeless example of Christ infiltrating darkness in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*: “It profoundly reveals how Douglass encountered an authentic Christ amid a Southern Christianity that, at the time, was so corrupt.” He continues, “[Douglass] is in the worst of all possible circumstances, and yet, despite deception, he meets Christ. How could that not be inspiring?”

Kenny’s love for theology continues to grow, as his habit of inquisitiveness and pursuit of Christ have stayed with him through his life and career. He values the works of N. T. Wright, C. S. Lewis, and G. K. Chesterton. Though, he jokes, “My theology friends would probably say that’s ‘light’ theology.” Kenny is also a great listener of Tim Keller and enjoys his sermons as a part of his daily devotions.

Outside of the classroom, Kenny finds motivation and inspiration in physical activity, fellowship, and the great outdoors. He works out with students after school, lifting weights alongside colleagues like Phil Higley, whom Kenny admires for his strength, friendship, and theological insight. As Kenny says, “Lifting weights with a theologian.

I mean, c’mon!” An avid mountain biker, Kenny enjoys the challenge of the climb and the fellowship of riding with his church group. In earlier years, he also pursued mountaineering, climbing peaks like Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Adams, and Mt. Baker, and attempting Mt. Rainier. Kenny’s adventures have taken him to locations like Spider Meadow and Spider Gap with students and colleagues, and to Froze to Death Plateau in Montana with a college friend. Reflecting on his Montana trip, Kenny recalls hiking at elevations near 11,000 feet, spending days surrounded by mountain goats, and taking in the breathtaking views en route to Granite Peak, Montana’s highest point. For him, these experiences were less about conquering mountains and more about his appreciation of fellowship and the joy of experiencing good challenges alongside friends.

Kenny has played guitar for over 36 years since he first picked it up in eighth grade, and he continues to be actively involved with music. He describes a great experience he had with a few colleagues during Upper School’s I-Fest talent show: “For years, Ryan Summers and I have thought, ‘We should do that,’” referring to the talent show. This year, they finally did it—Ryan played bass, Kenny played electric guitar, and Jared Mack sang “Living on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi. “I think the students didn’t realize [we

could play like that]— because it is one thing to say you play guitar, it’s another thing to throw down a Bon Jovi song. Mack killed it, and Ryan’s bass playing was on point. It was so good. I think they were a little bit surprised that we could do that. I was surprised that Jared could sing that high,” Kenny laughs. Kenny is also a member of his worship team at Eastridge Church, where he has played guitar for the past nine years. (They even released a Christmas EP in December 2024.)

Most recently, Kenny has been branching out of his typical repertoire and has enjoyed the challenge of exploring jazz techniques inspired by the jazz-fusion guitarist Cory Wong. “For 33 years, my guitar playing focused primarily on rock and worship music.” He continues, “It’s been a super rewarding experience to expand beyond what I’ve always known.”

Kenny’s life has had its challenges, including a crisis in 2018 when his daughter Rory was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 11. The diagnosis came during a severe snowstorm that began on Super Bowl Sunday, and Rory nearly slipped into a diabetic coma, which was a traumatic experience for the family. Kenny describes, “During that time, I reached out to people, texting and letting them know what was happening. I texted Patrick Carruth and Phil Higley, and they were both incredible during that process. They responded to my messages quickly and talked me through everything.” Kenny recalls, “Phil is amazing in a crisis. He’s got great answers, but he is also



Kenny with his children Rory '25 and Thad '22 after an Upper School *My Fair Lady* performance, 2023

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*When asked what he’s most proud of, Kenny reflects, “It’s probably cliché, but I would say I’m most proud of my kids.”*

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cliché, but I would say I’m most proud of my kids.” Kenny appreciates that Bear Creek’s liberal arts education invested in them over a broad range of disciplines. His son Thad, who graduated from Bear Creek in 2022, is currently student body president at Northwest University and is excelling in college.

Rory, a current senior at Bear Creek, is also a strong student across various subjects and has a deep, well-rounded understanding of her faith. She along with Jenne serve at Eastridge with the younger children, and Rory leads a group of seventh-grade students in the youth ministry. Rory wants to pursue a career as a pastor or Bible teacher and plans to attend Northwest University in the fall.

Kenny’s 20 years at The Bear Creek School have been marked by his passion for teaching, his pursuit of Christ, and his commitment to excellence in service to our community. We are grateful for his contributions as a skilled teacher and mentor, both in and outside the classroom, and for the lasting impact he has made on his students and colleagues alike.

great at listening.” He continues, “The same is true of Patrick. I know that, positionally, he is the boss. But there is an enormous heart there for helping people who are hurting and have questions. He is a ‘details’ guy, but also when it comes down to things like trauma, he was so pivotal for me in that moment—he and Phil—so I value that a lot.”

When asked what he’s most proud of, Kenny reflects, “It’s probably

# THE CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND HISTORY

*On October 10 - 12, 2024, The Bear Creek School history faculty travelled to Birmingham, Alabama, to participate in the biennial meeting of The Conference on Faith and History (CFH). The CFH is a scholarly community dedicated to encouraging excellence in the theory and practice of history from the perspective of historic Christianity.*

Several members of Bear Creek's history department presented their research at this conference. Dr. Rob Sorensen gave a paper on 5th-century statesman and monk Cassiodorus and his writings on Christian education. Mr. Mark Schuldt presented his work on using historical simulations in the classroom, a project that grew out of a historical learning game he created for a JanTerm class. Ms. Prisca Bird was a participant in a roundtable discussion about how secondary teachers can set the stage for university success. All were extremely well-received by the audience.

The participants' reflections show how valuable this kind of professional development can be for Bear Creek faculty as well as how The Bear Creek School as an institution can benefit from participating in the larger academic community.

## **ROB SORENSEN, HISTORY DEPARTMENT CHAIR**

I have been a member of CFH since 2010 and always take the opportunity to present a paper at the biennial meeting. It gives me an incentive to continue to write and research and allows me a venue to participate in the broader scholarly community. Every time I attend CFH, I bring home some new ideas, new resources, and new friends. This year, I participated in a seminar with some teachers who used the *Reacting to the Past* simulation curriculum which encouraged me to consider adapting some of their shorter interactive simulations into my AP European History course.

I also spent some time with the editor of *Christian History* magazine, a periodical that we sometimes use in class, and was able to brainstorm with him some new ways to engage students in reading about history.

The relationships that I have developed through CFH have been incredibly fruitful. It is a great advantage to know a wide variety of historians across the country who I can call on if I have questions or need advice. And it has also been fruitful for Bear Creek—Prisca Bird and I first met at CFH 2022, and it was through that meeting that she came to apply for a position at Bear Creek.

I also find that Bear Creek is earning a reputation as an institution that values scholarship and the liberal arts. I spoke with several professors from prominent Christian colleges who expressed admiration for what Bear Creek is doing at the secondary level.



COURTESY PHOTO

Rob Sorensen answering questions after presenting his paper

## BRENT STROBEL

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One practical benefit I received from attending The Conference on Faith and History in October was gathering new pedagogical ideas by connecting with other history educators nationwide. A stand-out was a presentation on simulated roleplay about the papal suppression of Jesuits in 1773. It has inspired me to look through the scope and sequence of my own United States History curriculum to see if I can insert a roleplay here or there. Additionally, another benefit was engaging in good historiography. Sometimes, in the day-to-day grind of teaching, particularly with AP classes, it can be easy to fall into a very pragmatic mode of teaching the content that students “need to know.” To be reacquainted with the scholarly world wherein historians are writing papers and investigating very nuanced themes was very cathartic, grounding, and a good reminder of how rich and nuanced history can be when people have time to investigate issues slowly and deeply. For instance, someone gave a paper which delved into a Confederate soldier’s journals and how he saw the Civil War as a fight to maintain his worldview which held the North as apostates and the South as defenders of the Christian faith. That particular story helped reinvigorate a personal and professional desire to bring nuance and personal stories to all the issues we discuss in AP United States History.

## JAMES KUHLE

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Networking at CFH was incredibly beneficial for me. I met a former middle school history teacher from the Los Angeles area who founded his own non-profit, Thinking Nation, centered on teaching historical thinking skills to students. Their tagline is “History is a discipline, not a content.” I also received some free resources that I am already incorporating into my grade 7 Medieval Western Civilization class, including new ways to hold Socratic seminars and develop historical thinking skills such as historical empathy.

## MARK SCHULDT

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By attending and presenting at CFH, I grew as a scholar and made connections that will make future research easier and help Bear Creek form relationships with historians at various colleges. I also learned a new way to use in-class simulations to make learning more interactive, which I hurried to include in the very next unit I taught to my freshmen Honors and Ancient World History students. These simulation techniques are an excellent way of delivering accurate information in a highly engaging and experiential way, and I expect this method of process-based learning may prove very powerful. (See more about this and an excerpt from Mark’s paper on pages 29 – 31.) Conferences like this are extremely motivating and energizing for me. One intangible benefit is a renewed love for my job and optimism about sending students to strong colleges.



Mark Schuldt points at *Vulcan*, one of the icons of Birmingham. The statue was built to symbolize the city's iron industry.





Rob Sorensen and Prisca Bird with colleagues on the secondary teachers' panel

## PRISCA BIRD

If I may be allowed to paraphrase the Tony award-winning musical *Hamilton*, attending CFH allows The Bear Creek School's history faculty to be "in the room where it happens." The "it" being the craft of history as practiced by actual historians. Teachers can become so preoccupied with the daily act of teaching (administrative responsibilities, creating assessments, etc.) that we forget what drew us to the profession in the first place—a love of the past and the desire to explore it within community. Attending CFH this year rekindled my first love of history.

It was energizing to see so many quality research presentations. My personal favorite was a paper about how court records revealed different understandings of the word "love" in medieval Yorkshire. Additionally, it was truly humbling to visit the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum and the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church.

CFH 2024 also allowed me to advance the interests of secondary teachers within the historian's guild. During my panel entitled Social Studies Education as a Civic Imperative, I had the opportunity to speak to the governing body of CFH and share about how secondary teachers are directly supporting the work done by college educators. I was also able to advocate

for increased collaboration with CFH professors and further our Beyond Bear Creek initiative to connect experts to high school students via classroom visits and other online programming. Additionally, I was able to line up over 20 interviews for future episodes of the CFH-sponsored podcast *Secondary Sources* that I co-host with David McFarland of Pacific Academy in Surry, BC. The podcast introduces high school history teachers to Christian historians and their current areas of research. Most of all, I was able to pray and fellowship with other Christians who view the discipline of history as a valuable way to uphold the scriptural injunction to "bear witness." I am deeply grateful to be part of a school that not only encourages but also actively invests in the professional development of its faculty.

I am so proud of my colleagues Rob Sorenson and Mark Schuldt. It was a blessing to see them present at CFH 2024 and use their academic training to bring glory to God. They are a credit to Bear Creek. The whole trip gave me a new appreciation for the strength of Bear Creek's history program. Our faculty members are not only capable scholars but excellent human beings who love others well.



The pulpit in the Hodges Chapel at Samford University features historic preachers Chrysostom, Hus, Knox, and Whitefield




*Teaching Computational Thinking in*  
**LOWER SCHOOL**

BY SINI FERNANDEZ

PHOTOS BY JANEEN SORENSEN

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*“The heart of a classical Christian education is teaching students not just the goods of the mind and what to think, but more importantly, how to think.”—Patrick Carruth, President and Headmaster, The Bear Creek School*



**W**hen we talk about teaching students “how to think,” we are usually referring to building critical thinking skills—learning to evaluate statements by seeking evidence, closely examining available facts, and analyzing the implications of that information. Through our computer programming curriculum, Bear Creek takes teaching students “how to think” to another level by imparting computational thinking skills.

Computer programming specialist Tony Grant explains, “Learning computer programming teaches great problem-solving skills. Students learn to systematically analyze problems, break down big

problems into smaller more manageable pieces, identify patterns, and find efficient solutions.”

Bear Creek has designed age-appropriate lessons that explore the grammar stage of computer science and teach the four cornerstones of computational thinking: **1) Decomposition:** breaking down a complex problem into smaller more manageable parts, **2) Pattern recognition:** looking for similarities among and within problems, **3) Abstraction:** focusing on the important information only, ignoring irrelevant

details, and **4) Algorithms:** developing a step-by-step solution to a problem.

Students discover, experiment with, and learn about all aspects of computers, including how they are created and how to write instructions (code) that computers can execute.

Beginning in grade 1, students learn to program



miniature robots using screen-free methods and advance to using tablets and laptops to create animations and games. For example, students program golf ball sized Ozobots utilizing just colored markers and paper worksheets to denote ordered sequences of instructions that tell the robot to traverse a path at varying speeds. Many of the early lessons focus on teaching students to solve puzzles by identifying the sequence of actions required to reach the goal.

In grade 2, students learn to recognize patterns to create code loops, utilizing a visual programming language called Blockly to program their Dot and Dash robots. They apply their know-how to program an all-xylophone robot marching band to play songs and move synchronously.

Beginning in grade 3, students learn to type on a QWERTY keyboard, an essential skill needed for classwork and more. In fact, about two-thirds of the class time is focused on keyboarding practice. Students also take a series of digital citizenship lessons and learn to practice responsible use of technology.

In grade 4, students continue to advance in their typing skills and learn to use Scratch, a visual programming language developed at MIT. They learn to animate characters and design simple games utilizing key coding concepts such as Boolean logic ( $=$ ,  $\neq$ ,  $>$ ,  $<$ ), functions, variables, and conditional statements (if, then, else).

The skills developed in Lower School computer programming classes will lead students to success whether they are conducting a science experiment, writing a paper, solving a math problem, or painting a picture. Computational thinking—to break down a problem into manageable pieces, look for patterns, identify the most important information, and determine an efficient sequence of steps to find a solution—will serve them well as they matriculate to Middle School and beyond.





```

when I receive Eat
  if touching Chick ? then
    start sound Bite
    hide
    change Food by 1
    go to front layer
    go to x: pick random -214 to 214 y: -150
    wait 0.2 seconds
    show

when I start as a clone
  go to x: Chick X Position y: -149
  change Egg Count by 1
  if Egg Size = small then
    switch costume to egg-small
  else
    switch costume to egg-large
    change color effect by 25
  show
  
```

Grade 4 students use Scratch to code a simple game in which the player moves a chick around a barnyard, “eating” apples and “laying” eggs. These examples illustrate a variety of coding blocks such as variables, conditionals, and events. The first code snippet (left) contains the instructions for the “Eat” event which plays a sound, increases the “Food” count, and moves the apple to a new random location in the barnyard. In the second example (right), the code block contains the instructions for “laying” a small egg or a large egg.

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CLASSICAL EDUCATION

By Karen Blankenbeckler  
Vice President for Academic Affairs

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In the late 80s and early 90s when I was completing my teacher training and beginning my first teaching job, there was a lot of buzz in the educational community about how the “internet” was going to change the purpose and goals of education. Taking it a step further, those charged with training educators were promoting a philosophy that we no longer needed to teach students the knowledge level or “the basics.” We only needed to teach students to “access information.” Their presupposition stated that because information was only a click away through search engines and databases, it was not necessary for students to memorize information, store knowledge in their minds, or practice basic skills. And so, the education pendulum swung, and many teachers stopped focusing on the basics and instead required students to discuss, apply, and evaluate information from each subject. What they quickly discovered was that students could not think critically, analyze, and evaluate things about which they knew nothing. The human brain cannot wisely apply and evaluate things about which it does not have knowledge. When we learn things, we build pathways in our brain; if the learning is

repeated enough times, it goes into our long-term memory. Once something is in our long-term memory, we can access it when needed. Even more profoundly, everything we learn changes the way we think and ultimately changes us.

Here we are in 2025, and we are once again discussing how technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), will affect the purpose and goals of education. The Bear Creek School has a compelling mission that guides us. When new things such as AI come our way, we do not waiver from the fundamental principles of what we learn, how we learn, or why we learn but instead ask whether AI can better help us fulfill this important mission. The mission of The Bear Creek School, “to provide a high quality Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that will enable each student to become the individual God intends,” informs our decisions in regard to the use of AI.

Artificial intelligence will not change “why” we educate students. The Bear Creek School is aimed at shaping a particular type of person: a person who can think critically, solve problems, learn

imaginatively, apply creativity, respect others, act with integrity. In summary, a person who is wise and virtuous.

The reason we educate shapes both our curriculum and our teaching methods. Our goal is to cultivate wise and virtuous individuals. We employ a classical methodology rooted in grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. This approach ensures that we adhere to proven educational practices and remain unaffected by changing educational trends.

However, great schools are always moving forward and improving. There is no such thing as standing still. As soon as a school stops improving, it starts moving backwards. At The Bear Creek School, we are embracing how we can use AI to make us even better. Standing on the solid principles of classical education, we can keep all that is important in our education while intentionally embracing new ideas.

As Bear Creek considers the use of AI, we are investigating how these tools could make us even better at achieving our learning objectives and outcomes by asking the following questions:

1. How can we use AI to provide individualized support for students to increase engagement and help every individual reach his or her learning goals?
2. How do we help students engage AI with wisdom, compassion, and courage?
3. How can AI help faculty and staff accomplish tasks more efficiently, allowing more time to focus on important strategic priorities, planning for student learning, and relationship building?

Last spring, we created a faculty and staff task force to develop a philosophy and policy regarding the use of AI at Bear Creek. This policy was used this past fall to train our teachers and our students regarding AI usage. This year, our innovation team is developing strategy and tactics to accomplish our goals. Our AI policy begins with this statement summarizing our use of AI:

At The Bear Creek School, faculty and staff should be empowered and encouraged to address challenges creatively, to grow and learn, and to view their Bear Creek experiences as a shared adventure. Faculty should maintain ancient and modern methods to best accomplish their pedagogical goals and student outcomes. Innovation should be viewed as a way of thinking, and the use of technology, specifically AI, should not be viewed as an end in and of itself, and both should be recognized as having an impact on shaping student minds. AI should therefore be used wisely and in concert with our other programs. We believe AI tools, together with our classical education model, can reinforce critical thinking skills and help us provide better individualized instruction. We don't just teach the goods of the mind and what to think but how to think and be creative.

I am in my 35<sup>th</sup> year at Bear Creek, and I am hopeful for our future. It is an exciting time to be part of a school that is intentional about its purpose and intentional about embracing new technologies that will help us improve. May the Lord continue to guide the Bear Creek community as we help students become the individuals He intends.



COURTESY PHOTO

# COOKING UP KINDERGARTEN READINESS

By Morgan Jamieson





COURTESY PHOTO

**WHEN YOU THINK OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS, COOKING MIGHT NOT COME TO MIND.** But at Valley Campus, it's one way that P5 students deepen their understanding of reading and mathematics while honing crucial developmental skills.

In some classical models, there is a trend to associate classical education with a particular image of discipline: children dressed a certain way, sitting at desks, in rows, neatly copying words—even at the preschool level. But that's not what classical education truly means. In the classical model, students learn in three stages: grammar (basic facts), logic (understanding how things connect), and rhetoric (expressing ideas clearly). The goal is to give students active, meaningful ways to engage with their learning at each stage.

Preschool lives in the grammar stage. Yet for preschoolers—and students of any grade—some of

the strongest learning doesn't happen through direct instruction but through new experiences and guided activities like cooking. Kellie Anderson, Bear Creek's first preschool teacher, introduced the cooking component as a way to connect learning objectives, particularly reading, to a special activity. Since Kellie retired from teaching in 2022, her longtime classroom assistant Angela Atwood has continued to teach cooking to our preschoolers. Over the past few years, Angela has refined the program to include stories and other new elements.

P5 students cook with Angela every other Friday. The program is well-organized, and each recipe corresponds with the letter of the week that students are learning. For instance, during P week, they craft pizzas, during F week, they make fruit salad, and for O week, they learn to make oatmeal cookies from scratch. When students enter the cooking classroom, Angela tells them they are chefs for



COURTESY PHOTO



COURTESY PHOTO

the day, and students get to wear little aprons and chef's hats. Then Angela reads a book related to the food they will be making. In the fall, during letter A week, Angela read *How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World* by Marjorie Priceman. It's a story of a little girl who finds that her market is closed, but she is not deterred from making her apple pie. The girl travels the world to gather the very ingredients that the students use in their cooking sessions: she goes to Italy to harvest wheat for flour, to France for a chicken egg, sneaks past a tiger in Sri Lanka to collect cinnamon bark, befriends an English cow for milk and butter, sails to Jamaica for sugar cane and to collect salt from the Caribbean Sea, and picks rosy apples from trees in Vermont.

Angela explains how P5 cooking isn't just about

preparing food—it's about making new discoveries and helping students connect more deeply with their classroom learning. She describes, "In DIG, we have a section where we learn about seeds, how things sprout, and how plants grow. Now, we take it further.

We talk about an apple farm and apple pie—how do apples grow? They can see how that process leads to something they can eat. How does it go from the apple seed to the apple pie?" She says, "If the students have questions, I answer them as they come up. I think that's the love of learning—not shutting them down but encouraging

them to figure it out together."

Faith formation plays into cooking sessions as well. "We incorporate faith moments because God is entwined in everything." She explains, "Connecting the food we eat to the world around us helps us

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**PRESCHOOL COOKING CLASS IS MORE THAN JUST AN ACTIVITY—IT SUPPORTS CREATIVITY, CURIOSITY, AND A LOVE OF LEARNING.**

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COURTESY PHOTO



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understand His creation. We say, ‘Look at how God made the world! Everything in the world has a life cycle, and isn’t it amazing? Look at the variety of foods He made. God is so good. Let’s thank Him for the things He has given us.’”

Each lesson supports reading, math, and dynamic fine motor skills, all while meeting multiple types of student learning. During G week, for example, students will hear a story to learn about Greek salad or its ingredients, see the word “Greek” written down, practice tearing lettuce into little pieces and cutting olives and tomatoes with a plastic knife, and count, measure, and add the oil and vinegar themselves. Cooking helps develop fine motor skills in ways that are meaningful to children, as well as turns abstract math concepts into real-world problem solving. Angela will ask, “If our recipe calls for one cup of flour, how many cups would we need if we are making two batches?” When students count how many blueberries or raspberries go into their fruit salad, measure out tablespoons of flour, or use

halving or doubling when making a recipe, they are reinforcing fundamental math concepts. When students roll out dough, crack eggs, or peel oranges, they are practicing hand-eye coordination, dexterity, and fine motor control.

Cooking is taught in P5 because that is when preschoolers are developmentally ready for the extra responsibility. Being able to follow multi-step instructions that require waiting, paying attention, and persevering is an important piece of kindergarten readiness. For example, one of Angela’s favorite lessons is teaching preschoolers how to make noodles from scratch. The students start by cracking eggs into flour and adding a bit of water. Angela says, “At first, flour and eggs don’t look like noodles, and they have to knead the dough until it is just right. They say, ‘This is hard work. This doesn’t look like noodles. Are you sure this will turn into noodles?’” But once they flatten their dough and roll it through the cutting machine, Angela reports, “Suddenly, it’s ‘Oh, I made spaghetti!’”

Making ice cream is another slow and challenging process. Students must shake their bag long enough for the rock salt and ice to turn the liquid into solid, but perseverance brings the reward of a sweet treat. She describes, “I love the little things that come out of it, like ‘Oh, this is how it’s made!’—they don’t really know what the result will be until it is right in front of them. I think it builds their confidence.”

Angela reflects, “I think this program is special because it lets them explore their world in new ways. And I’m okay with the mess.” Sometimes, the recipe doesn’t turn out quite right—like when they accidentally add a tablespoon of salt instead of a teaspoon. But even making mistakes is valuable because it is part of active learning. When children are in a safe environment, they can make mistakes and build their own masterpieces. This in turn gives them a sense of personal ownership, and they are more curious and encouraged to try new things. Angela finds that many students become more confident tasting new foods because they have touched, played

with, and prepared them. She describes, “Even kids who usually avoid vegetables are willing to give them a try at their own pace. When they have cut and explored the food, it sparks their curiosity.” She continues, “They may realize it’s not so bad. Of course, some still say, ‘That was horrible!’ and I tell them, ‘That’s okay—great job trying!’”

Preschool cooking class is more than just an activity—it supports creativity, curiosity, and a love

of learning. It is a way for P5 students to discover new things, grow in confidence, independence, problem-solving abilities, and contribute to their kindergarten readiness while learning more about God’s world. However, cooking requires significant time and resources, which is why many schools don’t include it in their programs. Angela has been integral to the cooking program’s success, and her passion for teaching and her dedication to students are evident in the amount of time and behind-the-scenes coordination she invests in every lesson.



The creative aspect—seeing children create their own masterpieces—delights Angela. Despite not being a cook herself, Angela was inspired by how much the children love cooking. “My aunt laughs and says, ‘They know who you are, right?’ because I’m not a cook. Well, at preschool, I can do it!” Angela has spent countless hours preparing recipes and lessons, calculating how much of each ingredient is needed for each class, breaking it down accordingly, accommodating

allergies with care, setting up ahead of time, and cleaning up afterward. Angela’s efforts make every other Friday a special event. Cooking creates the opportunity for P5 students to grow academically, socially, and spiritually all while having fun in the process. By the end of each lesson, students not only have a “masterpiece” to share and the feeling of pride, but also happy memories of preschool and a love of learning they will carry with them into kindergarten.

# On the Use of Simulation in Teaching History: Three Pedagogical Recommendations

BY MARK A. SCHULDT

UPPER SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER

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The following is a portion of a paper presented by Mark A. Schuldt at The Conference on Faith and History 2024.

Since very ancient times, across many cultures, there have been board games that incorporated abstract military concepts. These have been enjoyed for millennia, right down to the present time, and have even been credited with shaping the strategic thinking of their players in real warfare. However, none of these games, the most recognizable of which are chess and go, are used to train military officers or to plan campaigns. Thus, the use of the term “wargame” for military training and planning exercises can be, at first glance, misleading, giving one the impression of entertainment or leisure. Not until after the Second World War did the use of wargaming in military training and planning gain universal respect. This is because in the decades of development between the conclusion of the American Civil War and the attack on Pearl Harbor, wargaming definitively left its roots in board gaming behind and became a true exercise in war-simulation.

Beginning in the eighteenth century in Europe, several forms of chess were elaborated upon to add to the instructional value of the game for aspiring officers. Generally called “war-chess,” these games were a fascination to the elites of Europe for their entertainment value but never gained wide respect as valuable training or planning aids. However, in 1797, Georg Venturini invented a wargame designed not only to simulate battles but also the larger and more complex logistical needs of a military campaign. The use of wargaming to simulate the logistical needs

of a campaign and to plan accordingly would prove critical to the success of the United States in the Pacific.

Early in the twentieth century, the United States and Japan quickly identified each other as powers whose Pacific interests did not align. One way that the two powers could prepare for war without undue provocation, and on the shoe-string budgets imposed by the still young Japanese industrial economy and the Great Depression in the United States, was to rely heavily on wargaming.

The immensity and glamor of the Pacific War still glitters nearly a century later. That in the space of four years, the United States, a nation caught off-guard by an audacious, experienced, and technologically superior foe, could come to exercise dominion, so total, over the world’s largest ocean, that from the Antarctic to the Aleutian Islands not a single Japanese soldier, sailor, or civilian could count himself safe, is breathtaking. And yet, that the United States would do this was not a surprise to its leaders. Admiral Nimitz famously said in his 1960 address to the Naval War College that, “The war with Japan had been reenacted in the game rooms there by so many people, and in so many different ways, that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise, absolutely nothing except

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1 (Nimitz, An Address to Naval War College, 1960 October 10 1960) Digitized recording retrieved from <https://www.usnwcarchives.org/repositories/2/archival-objects/65005> (accessed September 11, 2024) Time Segment 19:30 - 19:59.

the kamikaze tactics towards the end of the war.”<sup>1</sup> Nimitz learned through his experimentation with wargames that the key to a Pacific victory would be a logistics force capable of spanning that ocean at all times and places. So, in the final appraisal, one could persuasively argue that it was not the giant battleships, the seemingly omnipresent carrier fleets, or the stealthy submarines that won the Pacific, but the humble Liberty class transport ships and T2 oilers, thousands of which plied the waves.

Perhaps World War II is the most vivid proof that modern wars are won more by logistics than by battles. But how does one teach that lesson to high school students? A powerful answer to this challenge is the use of simulation. Students often forget the content they learn in books, but the learning afforded by interactive simulation engages more of the mind and is therefore more “sticky.” Using simulation as an educational tool is not easy, as evidenced by the four centuries that passed between the invention of war-chess and the wargames that informed Nimitz’s naval policy. Offered below are three pedagogical recommendations essential to crafting and using effective simulations in the classroom for the purposes of teaching the principles of war.

### **PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATION 1: PURSUE A CLEAR AND CONCISE LEARNING OBJECTIVE.**

The most pervasive failure of early wargames was in their scope. Many of the wargames of the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries were plagued by impenetrable rulesets, the need for highly skilled and knowledgeable umpires, and interminably long playtimes. Perla speaks with the authority of a professional wargamer at the Naval War College, “A wargame’s objectives should be the principal drivers of its entire structure.”<sup>1</sup> So, if teaching the basics of logistics in the Pacific War is the overall goal, a far more specific goal is required for any simulation. Creating a suitable learning goal may take several

attempts to refine, but it is worth it for both the game designer and for the student. For example, see the refining process in learning objectives given below.

- Students will learn the basics of logistics in the Pacific War.
- Students will practice logistics by keeping a World War II campaign supplied across the island groups of the South Pacific.
- Students will be able to show how transportation of supplies keeps a campaign operational in the South Pacific during World War II.

Both the learning outcome and the geographical scope of the simulation are refined to the point where the exact concept can be targeted, practiced, and analyzed for effective learning.

### **PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATION 2: DO NOT PLAY A BOARDGAME.**

Since the seventeenth century, the disconnect between boardgames and military simulations has been consistently apparent. The most fundamental difference is that boardgames are made to be enjoyable so as to sell more copies. A “well-balanced” game is one whereby players each have a fair chance and there is no single strategy that is guaranteed to result in success. War is very nearly the opposite. If the learning objective is clear and founded in actual history, it will not be achieved by a commercial product that is most likely based on dissimilar objectives and whose chief end is replayability.

### **PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATION 3: CREATE A LOOP OF ANALYSIS, ALTERATION, AND REPLAY.**

It is easy to assume that the exercise built for the learning objective is self-evidently effective. However, it is a fact of wargames that the real learning is not so much in the simulation itself but in the analysis of the simulation. All the work that goes into the creation and playing of the wargame is distilled into powerful learning by debriefing the experience. The instructor should

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1 (Perla 1990), 165.

use mapping mechanics or detailed observations to isolate individual decisions and connect them to game outcomes. Only with this analysis does the simulation go from the level of a complex boardgame to a real exercise in learning. Developing an excellent simulation may require several courses to play it. The results will be worth the time.

In conclusion, wargames possess a powerful

educational ability to take abstract concepts and make them into an engaging experience from which can be drawn significant analytical learning intuitively. Using simulation not only allows a student to practice concepts, but it also helps the student empathize with the decision-makers of the past. One may find that a tactile, interactive, cooperative, and empathetic experience delivers more impactful and lasting learning.

## EXPLORATION OF THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THROUGH SIMULATION

**IN HIS HONORS ANCIENT AND WORLD HISTORY CLASS** for freshmen, Mark Schuldt uses simulation to explore the Athenian democratic process after the Mytilenean revolt in 427 BC. The issue up for vote is how to address the rebellion of the city of Mytilene against the Athenian Empire. The two proposed options are to spare the city and impose a rigorous tax or to kill all the men of the city and enslave the women and children. The first option would bring wealth to the city, and the second would intimidate Athens' other subject cities to avoid future rebellions.

Students are divided into a red tribe and a blue tribe. Within those tribes, they are further split into three social classes—aristocrats, merchants, and commoners. Referring to cards explaining the top motivations of each group represented, students make deals with one another to create a coalition

strong enough to earn 51% of the vote. Based on the vote and how well their personal goals are achieved by the final outcome, they gain *kleos*, which is the Greek word for glory or reputation.

The goal of the simulation is not just that students experience the Athenian political process but that they learn about the complexities of Athenian politics based on the various group loyalties which were driven by the underlying desire for personal social advancement. This drive for personal advancement eventually led Athenians to make numerous decisions based on the benefit to individuals rather than sound policy that would benefit their city. In the end, the accumulation of Athens' bad decisions led to its downfall in the Peloponnesian War. Athenian recklessness, cruelty, selfishness, and short-sightedness cost them their independence, and in 2,300 years, they have yet to regain it.



JANEEN SORENSEN



JANEEN SORENSEN

# An Interview with Band Director **KELSEY THOMPSON**

BY MORGAN JAMIESON

**K**ELSEY THOMPSON, BEAR CREEK'S UPPER SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND DIRECTOR, has been instrumental in shaping the school's band program. "Our school has such a robust band program for its size," she shares. "One of the distinctive features of Bear Creek's music program is the strong support we receive as a music faculty." Her leadership, combined with strong support from the administration and Bear Creek families, has allowed the band program to thrive and offer numerous unique opportunities for students each year.

Each fall, Kelsey takes the Upper School band students to visit a local college campus. During the visit, students meet with the college's band director who leads them in a rehearsal. Then they

get to observe the college's band ensemble and spend time in the college's recreation center. Most recently, the band went to Central Washington University in Ellensburg. For many of the freshmen and sophomores, it is their first experience visiting a college campus. These trips give students a glimpse into college life and allow them to consider how playing in a group could fit into their college experiences. "It's eye-opening for them," Kelsey describes. "We talk about what music could look like for them in college and how even if they choose not to major in music, they can still play in ensembles."

One of Kelsey's goals is to introduce the students to professional careers in music. "I love to bring in people who are working musicians, composers, or music arrangers—anybody who works in the industry



HOWARD CAMPBELL

Upper School jazz band performed with the Danny Kolke Trio at the 2024 A Celebration of Jazz concert. Michael Glynn on bass and Greg Williamson on drums pictured.



COURTESY OF JOHN O'GARA

Kelsey stands with students selected to perform in the 2024 Northwest High School Honor Band at Pacific Lutheran University.





SINI FERNANDEZ



COURTESY OF JULIE GEISTFELD

(Above) Middle School students tour the University of Washington at the Pacific Northwest Band Festival.

(Left) Upper School concert band performs at the 2024 Upper School Spring Concert.



JANEEN SORENSEN


The grades 7 and 8 band members enjoyed their visit from composer Megan Vinther. She worked with them on her piece "Brigid of Kildare," which the band performed at the Pacific Northwest Band Festival at the University of Washington.

and might have insight that would be interesting to the students," she describes. Last year, the band worked with Megan Vinther, a composer and band director in Everett, who spent a day with the students to talk about her music and share her published work. This year, Major Bruno, a composer and sound designer for video games, joined via Teams to walk students through his music-writing process. "It's always good for the students to hear a different perspective," Kelsey says. "Sometimes these musicians reinforce what I've been teaching but say it in a different way. This helps the students realize that what they are learning does not just apply within our walls; it's not just us. All musicians know how this works, so I could bring in a director from another country, and he or she would be able to make music with us."

For the last two years, the Upper School jazz band has performed a special concert called A Celebration of Jazz with a guest artist. The guest artist rehearses with the students several times before the concert

and then performs alongside them. In 2023, Jacob Zimmerman was our guest artist. In 2024, Danny Kolke rehearsed with the students and brought the Danny Kolke Trio to play with them. This year, Jim Sisko, the jazz band director at Bellevue College, asked if he could bring the Bellevue College jazz band to play at Bear Creek. "It's going to be really exciting to have our students and the Bellevue College students play together," Kelsey says. "The more people I can get in front of the students, working with them, the more it helps them realize that what we're doing is universal."

Opportunities to participate in annual festivals and competitions also enrich the band program. The Middle School concert band visits the University of Washington for the Pacific Northwest Band Festival, and the Upper School concert band attends the Washington Music Educators Association (WMEA) Northlake Regional Band Festival. Additionally, Upper School band students compete in Northlake Region



Students in the Middle School concert band enjoy “bandcakes” together after the Christmas at Bear Creek Band Concert.

JANEEN SORENSEN

Solo and Ensemble competitions, sponsored by the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA), in which they can advance to represent Bear Creek at the state level if they place first in their division.

The benefits of developing musical ability are well-documented. Playing a musical instrument stimulates the entire brain, strengthens synapses, and aids in overall development. Beyond these cognitive and developmental benefits, Kelsey highlights the unique advantage to playing in an ensemble. “Band is more like a team sport,” she explains. “In music class—whether band, choir, or general music—each student’s performance directly impacts everyone else’s. This differs from a math class, for example, where Johnny’s grade doesn’t really have any impact on Susie. In band, if one person is not pulling his or her weight, it affects everybody in the room.”

To foster teamwork and friendship in her class, Kelsey starts off the year with a night of bowling

with her Upper School band students. “We just go out for an evening, usually the first week of school before homework gets too heavy, to hang out and do something fun to get to know one another.” She says, “I find that the more the students can buy into the team mentality, the more they will perform for each other, resulting in everyone improving.”

“Bandcakes” is another community-building activity Kelsey holds throughout the year. “During our first class after each concert, we have a pancake meal for breakfast or lunch and take the time to watch the concert together and celebrate the experience,” Kelsey describes. “We are not digging in or listening critically; we do that another time. It is just a fun moment to watch the concert and talk about anything funny. They like to laugh with each other a little bit and enjoy good food together.” Kelsey finds that community building ultimately serves the goal of creating great music. “A rising tide lifts all boats” is a saying she likes to use.



HOWARD CAMPBELL

"When we play as a group, we function with a constant feedback loop. Music teachers are constantly assessing, and students are constantly assessing themselves and working on self-assessment throughout the entire class period: Did that go well, or did that not go well? How do I fix that?" She describes, "It is the skill of learning to work with others, being able to articulate what you think about what just happened, and then making the change to improve it. Teaching these skills is transferable across all disciplines. As they grow and must work with others in their jobs and careers, they will need to know how to work with people. Even within your own family, you must know how to work with others and communicate with them to be in relationship."

Working in collaboration also means learning to overcome challenges as a team. "They might be having a bad day or an argument with somebody, but they still need to make something beautiful with everyone in the group," Kelsey says. "Ultimately, it is

not about the individual but about the group and our school community as a whole."

Bear Creek's unique structure as a preschool through grade 12 school enhances the music program's ability to serve the school community. "One of the wonderful things about teaching at Bear Creek is that we are all available to each other. For example, the Upper School drumline can hype school spirit when they play at Middle School events," Kelsey explains. "This setup is inspiring for younger musicians, as they can see what they will be a part of when they grow older." Every June, a year-end family BBQ for Upper School concert band brings together current band members with rising freshmen as well as newly-enrolled concert band students and their families. "It's great to see the new families show up and get to know other Bear Creek families," Kelsey shares.

The band program includes opportunities for mentorship and engagement across divisions. Upper

(Left) Upper School concert band performs at the 2024 Christmas at Bear Creek Band Concert.

(Right) Upper School band students visit Bear Creek Preschool to play and showcase their instruments at "B Is for Band."



CINDY MCCAHERILL

School students work with Middle School students through afterschool "Band Buddies," a tutoring program that benefits both groups: the fifth graders who receive additional instruction and the older students who solidify their knowledge through teaching. Another highlight is "B Is for Band," an annual visit by Upper School band members to Bear Creek Preschool where they play and showcase their instruments. "It is a valuable way to serve our school community," Kelsey says, "It helps preschool students see the full scope of their education to understand that once they reach Upper School, they can give back to the younger students."

"All of us in the Fine Arts Department recognize that we are created by a creative God and made in His image as creative beings," Kelsey reflects. "When we use our musical talents and abilities to honor God, we are fulfilling His purpose for us as creators." Through hymns and modern worship songs, the program lets students connect with the rich canon of Christian

music. Kelsey says, "Public school teachers use hymns because they are part of the canon of good music, but for us, they mean something more. We can talk about the lyrics, the history of the song and the church." She continues, "I can also use modern worship songs as teaching tools in class, which is really fun for the students. They hear the song in Chapel, and then we'll use it as a warm-up in band the next day. This is something unique that we get to do."

Kelsey explains how our school's vision for the band program goes beyond just music. "We want our students to have a rich and fulfilling music experience at Bear Creek, understanding that what they do is for the glory of God and not just for their enjoyment. This is what we do from preschool through grade 12. Using music to live out what God has created us to do is one of the ways we can honor Him," she emphasizes. "Our program is strong and growing, and we are excited about the future."

# A PASSION FOR VOLUNTEERING: HELEN HE'S JOURNEY

BY THERESA LARSEN  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

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When Helen and her husband Michael Wang made the decision to move their family from Phoenix to Seattle in 2017, they were not expecting that their journey would lead them to become part of The Bear Creek School community. However, Helen knew from the moment their children Jeremy '30 and Sarah '27 entered the school that they had found a place where love, learning, and community came together in a way that resonated with their values. Over the years, Helen has embraced multiple volunteer roles at Bear Creek. From photographer to field trip chaperone, she is always eager to contribute her time and talents to this community that has welcomed her family with open arms.

When Helen and her family moved to Seattle, Jeremy started in a Montessori program while Sarah attended public school. However, after a semester, the family began searching for a private school close to their new home that would provide a nurturing environment. Their visit to Bear Creek stood out.

“We were looking for a school where Sarah and Jeremy could develop and grow in a loving environment,” Helen shares. “When we visited Bear Creek, we immediately felt that it was the right fit for us. We are so thankful to be part of the Bear Creek family.”

This decision was not just about academic excellence but also about finding a place where the family could align with the school's faith-based values. The couple, both originally from China, found the atmosphere at Bear Creek both refreshing and meaningful. While Helen and Michael's educational

backgrounds were rooted in traditional Chinese schooling, where learning was mostly teacher-centered, they were drawn to Bear Creek's nurturing environment.

“At Bear Creek, children are encouraged to think for themselves, ask questions, and explore the ‘why’ and ‘how’ behind concepts,” Helen explains. “It's such a contrast to the rigid structure we were used to, and we love that it fosters a love of learning in our children.”

Helen's involvement at Bear Creek began shortly after Jeremy entered first grade. Initially, she volunteered in the classroom as an art docent and reading station helper. “I was having as much fun as the students,” she laughs. “It was so fulfilling to see the children's creativity in their artwork and to read stories with them.”

This initial involvement quickly expanded as Helen found herself volunteering in various capacities. She became a regular photographer at school events, capturing moments that many parents would cherish for years. Her love for photography, coupled with her desire to be involved, made this a perfect fit. Whether it was snapping pictures on a field trip or at community events, she took great joy in preserving these memories for the entire school community.

“I love capturing special moments with the children,” she says. “It's so rewarding to look back and see how much they have grown, not just physically, but in their experiences and accomplishments.”

In addition to photography, Helen contributes to



other key events at the school, including the Bear Creek Cultural Celebration. As the organizer for the Chinese cultural tables, she was able to share her heritage with the school community, fostering understanding and appreciation for different cultures. “The Cultural Celebration is such a special experience,” she says. “We’re grateful that Bear Creek gives us the chance to showcase Chinese culture while also learning about other cultures represented at the school.”

In the last six years, Helen has undertaken a variety of volunteer roles from cookie baker and Christmas decorator to field trip chaperone and math station helper. “I’ve enjoyed every opportunity to serve,” she says. “Each volunteer role has allowed me to connect with the children and other parents in different ways.”

In fact, it’s the sense of community that has had the most profound impact on Helen’s life. “One thing that really surprised me about Bear Creek is how

many of the teachers take on dual roles,” she shares. “The math teacher might also teach P.E. or the history teacher might coach soccer. It’s incredible to see how passionate the staff is about engaging with the students on so many levels.”

Moreover, Helen appreciates the active involvement of other parents at the school. “The parents at Bear Creek are so committed. Through volunteering, I’ve made so many meaningful friendships and learned a lot from other parents who give their time and energy so selflessly.”

Volunteering at Bear Creek has not only allowed Helen to contribute to the school community, but it has also been an enriching experience for her personally. “It’s true what they say, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’” she reflects. “Volunteering has been a source of joy for me and seeing the positive impact on the students makes it all the more fulfilling.”

As the years pass, Helen continues to treasure every moment she spends at school. “Our children are growing up so quickly, and I want to be there to support them as much as I can,” she says. “Being a volunteer allows me to be a part of their school life and to witness their growth and development.”

Looking ahead, Helen hopes that the values and education her children receive at Bear Creek will continue to shape their lives in meaningful ways. “We hope that Sarah and Jeremy will be guided by God’s Word,” she says. “We want them to grow into the people that God intends them to be, and we are grateful that Bear Creek helps nurture their faith and character.”

As a family, they are committed to supporting the school and being active members of the Bear Creek community. Helen feels that the love and care the school provides extend beyond the classroom and have become a central part of their lives.

“We are so thankful to be part of a school that values love, faith, and community,” she says. “It’s truly a blessing to be here.”



COURTESY PHOTO

# SETTING AN EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

BY MORGAN JAMIESON

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**L**eonard and Jenn Tracy joined the Bear Creek community in 2022, when their son Roman, the oldest of their two boys, enrolled at Bear Creek Preschool as a P3 student. Initially drawn to Bear Creek through a family connection, the Tracys developed a deep appreciation for the school after experiencing the faculty and community firsthand. They describe, “We fell in love with the wonderful, warm faculty, the values the school teaches, and the community of parents around us. It has been a joy watching our children grow and flourish here. We really can’t say enough about the school and the gifts we’ve already received stemming from our short involvement.” Roman is now in kindergarten, and his younger brother Oliver is a P4 student in

his second year at Bear Creek Preschool.

“Giving, in our family, is both an expression of faith and a joy,” they describe. “We choose to support Bear Creek because we feel that this school, teaching and fostering the values it does, is serving a great purpose in our community. We want to help preserve that tradition and to help make it available to as many families as possible.”

For the Tracys, the aspects of Bear Creek that they value most extend beyond the academic environment. They share, “We value the care and concern shown for our children and our family and the amazing environment the school provides. We also love the tight-knit, supportive community



of families with similar values and the opportunity to partner with teachers to be intimately involved in our children's education."

Jenn is involved in serving the school through various roles including as mentor mom, organizing class parties, and assisting in Roman's art classes. For her, the most meaningful part of being involved is connecting with the community of parents and teachers and helping to bring new families into the community. She also enjoys time spent with the children in the classroom, contributing to their school experience.

Teaching their children to be generous is a priority for the Tracys. Leonard and Jenn can each attribute their commitments to generosity and involvement to the models set during their childhoods. They reflect, "We both have parents who exemplified generosity and involvement throughout our lives, whether that was through contributing financially or their time and effort. Their examples have certainly helped shape our own values and the values we are trying to teach our children." One approach they use is drawn from the children's book, *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud. They describe, "Our kids really took to the idea of 'filling buckets.' We often use that metaphor to help guide their interactions with others. Our hope is to instill the idea that expressing kindness and generosity helps others be happy, helps ourselves be happy and fulfilled, and helps reveal God's love for all of us."

The Tracys' philanthropic support extends beyond Bear Creek to organizations that aim to reduce suffering and promote well-being in the community. They share, "Seattle Children's Hospital is always on our list for the amazing work they do. Additionally, we like to support several organizations that focus on combatting homelessness and its many causes, such as addiction and mental health issues." Among the organizations they support are Union Gospel

Mission, Weld Seattle, Mary's Place, and Friends of Youth.

"We certainly hope other families are having the same wonderful experience in the school that inspired us," they continue. "A huge part of our experience is the warmth and authenticity we've felt from faculty, staff, and other parents. We think preserving that environment and helping it prosper depends on the community's participation. To that end, we would encourage everyone to be involved and contribute however they can."

## INVEST IN THE FUTURE

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# BEAR CREEK CULTURAL CELEBRATION



**IN OCTOBER 2024**, Bear Creek families learned more about fellow community members while enjoying food, activities, presentations, games, and a cultural showcase of performances which represent our families' backgrounds, talents, and traditions. Students were invited to complete a passport and win fun prizes by visiting the various presenter tables.



PHOTOS BY:  
MICHAEL KAFCHINSKI  
CHEN LIU  
CINDY MCCAHILL



# *Tyler Kowal*

## *Class of 2004*

**BY CLAIRE DAVIS**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**  
**OF ALUMNI RELATIONS**

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Since graduating from Bear Creek in 2004, Tyler Kowal says his journey has been nothing short of a blur. “I have always been someone who likes to be on the move, looking around corners for the next adventure.” From working at Deloitte, a global accounting firm, to a career at Amazon where he got to travel the world for work, Tyler gained invaluable experiences that helped him build the career foundation he has today.

Nearly ten years ago, a few Bear Creek alums and faculty reached out to Tyler for accounting help, and what started as a side gig quickly grew to be Pitch CPA, one of the largest independent accounting firms on the Eastside.

Tyler explains, “I am a huge soccer fan (my wife and I met on a soccer field, too) and was trying to think of a professional term that was also somehow linked to soccer. After a lot of thought, I came up with ‘pitch.’ Pitch is what Europeans call a soccer field, and it is also a broad term that is loosely tied to business. It’s been fun explaining the meaning to various state agencies and clients.” He says the conversations help him personalize “who we are as a firm.”

His entrepreneurial spirit had been in hibernation since high school when he and Galen Haws ’04 ran

an auto body detail shop while attending The Bear Creek School. Tyler says, “Being out on my own was exciting and terrifying, but the entrepreneurial bug was rekindled, and I never looked back.”

“In the first year of business, I had 20 clients, most of whom were friends and family,” Tyler recalls. “There was a clear need for quality, relationship-driven accounting help, and quickly the clients who were friends and family were outnumbered by referrals and others.” Despite the company’s growth, Tyler and his long-term clients still reminisce about the early days and holding meetings in his home office. They cherish the strong relationships they have built along the way.

“I don’t even know where to begin, because we still feel like we are in the process of building this company,” Tyler says. Every day, he and his team gather to have conversations on reviewing processes to make sure that they are as efficient as possible and providing the best value for their clients.

Reflecting on this journey, Tyler says, “I am so thankful for the clients we have and their trust and willingness to grow with the firm.” His testament to the success of his company is, “If you are not always trying to improve, you will never succeed.”

Tyler stays connected with a few members of his Bear Creek class, meeting up for dinner and coffee. He also works closely with Mac Graham '07, who was one of Tyler's very first employees at Pitch CPA, now a partner in the firm. "It was a scary step to grow a business from working out of a home office to being in a position to afford and hire a full-time experienced employee." Tyler reflects, saying, "Looking back on the years working together, the firm would not be where it is without the input and guidance Mac has provided."

One of the most surprising aspects of running his own business has been the freedom and responsibility that come with it. Tyler often reflects on this, realizing how much he enjoys the autonomy. "There is no one watching over your shoulder to say, 'Did you think about this?' or 'What about that?' It's all up to me to determine what to focus on," Tyler explains.

Tyler thrives on the challenge of managing various aspects of the business, from keeping up with tax code updates to handling employee benefits. Each day brings new tasks and decisions, and he relishes the opportunity to shape the company's direction.

A key part of this journey is his partnership with Mac Graham. "Mac has been a great business partner in this adventure," Tyler says. Their daily discussions about what is going well and what needs improvement are invaluable. These conversations allow Tyler to articulate his thoughts and figure out how to turn ideas into actionable plans.

Together, they navigate the complexities of the business, finding solutions and celebrating successes. The freedom to make decisions and the responsibility to see them through has become one of the most rewarding aspects of Tyler's entrepreneurial journey.

Another rewarding part of Tyler's journey has been witnessing the firm's growth and success. He often marvels at how they expanded from twenty to hundreds of clients. "It's staggering to look back

and see our growth," he reflects. However, this rapid expansion also brought its own set of challenges. Tyler's goal is to always provide clients with high quality and high frequency touchpoints, a task that has become increasingly difficult as the firm grows.

Tyler constantly brainstorms ways to maintain the small firm relationship with clients despite the business's expansion. He has learned that problems often appear simple at first glance, but when you consider interactions with other processes or impacts on multiple clients, the solutions are rarely clear-cut. By looking beyond the immediate issue, Tyler developed scalable solutions for the firm. One significant investment was in software to streamline the document collection process for clients, allowing for curated document request lists tailored to each client's needs.

Overall, Tyler feels immense gratitude for the journey and the opportunities he has encountered. "It is such a blessing to look back at how the firm has grown and changed, and I am thankful daily for the opportunity I have been provided," he concludes.

When asked about what advice he would give to current Bear Creek students, Tyler shares his wisdom, "Do not be afraid to make a mistake and try something new. There is never a clear path forward in life. The classroom will teach you the fundamentals for how to solve a problem, but the real world will give you the opportunity to try something new that might not always work the first time around." He adds, "If you are always trying to make a project perfect, you may never actually take that first step. When you try something new and make improvements along the way, there will be an opportunity for you to do things you never dreamed possible."



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## GRATITUDE GALA

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