



# the *Academy* ADVANTAGE

*Spring 2025*







# From the *Principal*

*Dr. Vincent Montoro*

## ***Dear CCA Community,***

As we usher in the spring season, we are filled with gratitude and excitement for all the ways God has worked in the life of our school over the last 75 years.

The Spring edition of *The Academy Advantage* is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the incredible journey we have shared this year, celebrate the achievements of our students, faculty and staff, and look ahead to the many possibilities that lie before us.

This year, we have witnessed growth, both spiritually and academically. Whether through engaging classroom discussions, inspiring service projects, or exciting student activities, we are seeing the heart of our mission come to life: to provide an environment in which our students, faculty and staff will grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

We want to celebrate the partnership that exists between our school, families and the broader community. Your unwavering support — through prayer, volunteerism and financial contributions — enables us to continue our goal to create an environment where each student may be able to thrive and develop a strong foundation for their academic and career aspirations.

As we look ahead to the remainder of this school year and beyond, we are eager to continue fostering a Christ-centered, innovative and nurturing environment for all of our students. We are excited to share with you the ways we are continuing to grow and improve — from new academic programs to campus enhancements — as we strive to be the best school we can be.

Thank you for your continued support of Christian Central Academy. Together, we are shaping the future, one student at a time, and I am confident that the impact of our work today will be felt for generations to come.

In Christ's service,

*Vincent Montoro*

Vincent Montoro, PhD



## *Join US!*

Events Open to the  
Community at CCA

- March 22 - CCA Day of Prayer and Fasting
- May 2 - Chiavettas Fundraiser
- May 3 - Student Led Night of Worship
- May 24 - CCA Day of Prayer and Fasting

Follow our social media channels for more details.



## CHRISTIAN CENTRAL ACADEMY

**The Academy Advantage**  
Spring 2025

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# WHAT'S *Inside*

## On the Cover

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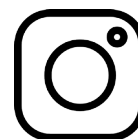
Information Central .....

<https://linktr.ee/ChristianCA>



Find us on  
Facebook or  
Join our CCA  
Parents' Page.

@Christian\_Central\_Academy





# *a message from the* **CCA Board of Directors**

**A**s we continue celebrating Christian Central Academy's 75th anniversary, I am reminded of our theme verse for this year. Deuteronomy 7:9 states, "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations."

When Moses spoke these words to the Israelites they were assembled at the banks of the Jordan River. God had brought them through a 40-year season of trials and blessings, and now they stood before their promised destination. Reading the full account of the Israelites' wanderings reveals how God faithfully provided for His people.

## ***LOOKING BACK:***

The Board of Directors has seen God's faithfulness in many ways over the past months but we are especially excited to see growth in these areas:

- **Spiritual Growth in our Middle and High School:** Students desire to grow in their faith. This is seen by their participation in the Crusaders Theological Society, a student-established Friday night youth group, lunch mentor groups and requests for one-on-one discipleship. God continues to use our Campus Pastor as he teaches, develops relationships and counsels students from the truth of God's Word.
- **Academic Growth:** Our high school students have more choices for Dual Enrollment classes this year. These classes allow students to receive college credit. We hope to continue expanding in this area as we seek to partner with more Christian colleges and universities.
- **Performing Arts:** Our Music Department has grown quantitatively and qualitatively. We invite you to experience the beautiful voices in our student-led worship team (March 25), and Middle & High School choirs (May 28 & 29) and to see the growth in our orchestra and band (May 28 & 29). Stay tuned to CCA's social media for announcements about the spring elementary school musical (May 7 & 9)!

## ***LOOKING FORWARD:***

We are praying for God to supply these needs. Will you commit to praying with us?

- **Admissions:** We pray that God will bring us 60 new students for the 2025-26 school year. The best recommendations come from current and former parents. Would you be willing to share with two families this month about how God is working at CCA?
- **Academics:** Recently, we began an Artificial Intelligence pilot program with our 8th and 10th grades. We are excited to see what the future holds and how AI may support the strong academic education our students receive at CCA.
- **Head of School:** The Board is prepared and committed to guiding the school through this transition with prayerful wisdom and care. Please visit CCA's website for updates ([www.christianca.com/headofschoolsearch](http://www.christianca.com/headofschoolsearch)).

I invite you to come and see what God is doing at Christian Central Academy. Your heart will be warmed, and I promise you will leave CCA excited about what you see and hear!

To God be the glory!

Sincerely,

Karen Jones  
Board President

## **Christian Central Academy Board of Directors**

Karen Jones - President

Jesse Jerge - Treasurer

Matt Carson - Secretary

Zach Kashevaroff, DC

Rebekah Lattimer

Jessica Pappas

Jay Sackett

Matt Stewart



## Remembering The Big Blue Water Tower: 20 Years Later

by Heather Mattiuzzo

# Vintage

This year marks 20 years since the iconic Big Blue Water Tower left the CCA field. If you attended Homecoming this past September you may have heard Mrs. Lawrence share the story of when she first came to CCA – overwhelmed in her new role she made a list of things to improve on campus with the water tower’s removal being at the top. She recalls talking to the town who insisted it didn’t need to come down. But one day, it was simply gone. Mrs. Lawrence reflected, “Has the same God that took down the wall at Jericho, in response to Joshua’s prayer, taken down the threatening water tower? I didn’t have to lift a finger. The water tower had vanished.”

The students in the 2005 yearbook remember the tower fondly. They wrote: “New York City has the Statue of Liberty. St. Louis has the Gateway Arch. San Antonio has the Alamo. And until this year, CCA had the Big Blue Water Tower.” It became a symbol of our school and for many a beloved “eyesore” that carried memories for years.

Coach McNamara, a beloved P.E. teacher at CCA for decades, had a love-hate relationship with the tower. From reprimanding students for throwing rocks at it to sending his P.E. classes “running to the water tower” for their drills, it became a staple of CCA sports.

And then, of course, there’s the mysterious “Dan” duo known for their graffiti art on the water tower. The origins of their work remain a mystery, but the stories live on.

Though the Big Blue Water Tower may no longer stand on campus, its legacy is forever etched in our hearts. It was more than just a structure; it was a piece of CCA history that shaped the experience of generations of students, teachers and alumni. The tower may have been taken down, but the recollections remain and it will always have a special place in the story of CCA.

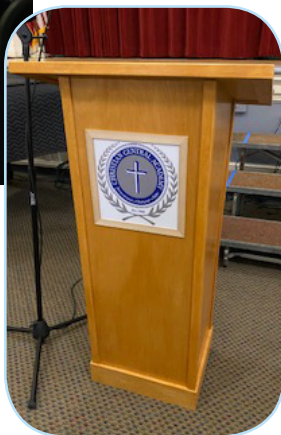
As we reflect on CCA’s 75 years of history, the Big Blue Water Tower stands as another fun and memorable milestone in our journey. It’s a reminder of how far we’ve come, the memories we’ve created and the milestones that continue to shape our community. Here’s to 75 years of legacy and to many more stories that have made CCA what it is today. ■



## Present



▲ Previous Podium



Newly Designed  
Updated Podium ▶

Sharon Backus, who designed and built the CCA podium in the auditorium many years ago, has now built its replacement with a new logo and stronger design to meet the needs of our auditorium. She shared a few words when she delivered the new podium.

I’m thankful for the ministry of CCA and for the privilege of being a part of it. I wanted to contribute to the 75th Anniversary of CCA, so building an updated podium is my anniversary present to the school. With help from family members, and access to professional tools, we got the job done.

While working on the project, I kept praying that whoever stands behind this podium would continue to promote Christian Education and teach the pure truth of Scripture. Words from Psalm 78:4 will be on a small donor plaque (that has been ordered), “... tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done.” That is my prayer for how this podium will be used.

*Thank you, Mrs. Backus for your longstanding dedication to CCA and the gift to be used for generations to come!*

# Enrichment WEEK

The week between semesters is a break from the curriculum for Middle and High School students as they explore three of the courses while expanding their knowledge outside the classroom.



▲ Watercolor Class by Mrs. Reverol



▲ Ceramic Hand-Building by Mrs. Guerin



▲ Cooking Skills by Mr. Napoli

## 2025 Course List

Auditorium Media Tech  
Badminton  
Baton Twirling  
Beginner Woodcarving  
Bungee Fitness  
Ceramic Hand Building  
Christ in Cinema  
Coffee: The Art & Science

Cooking Skills  
Digging for Gold  
Educational Video Creation\*  
Engaging with Children  
Español En Vivo  
Etiquette & Social Graces  
Film Study  
Fun Time Reading Bonanza

Hands-on Science  
Historical Boardgames  
Holistic Nutrition  
Inquisitive Minds  
Maintenance Survival Skills  
Musical Evaluation  
Musical Theater  
Preaching & Teaching

Radio Controlled Aircraft  
Russia: Past and Present  
Serving Like Jesus  
Theological Forum  
Unique Sports  
Watercolor Painting  
Worldwide Sports  
Worship Guitar

\*Projects can be found on our Youtube Channel



▲ Engaging with Children by Mrs. Gwinn



▲ Worship Guitar by Mrs. Hancock



▲ Holistic Nutrition by Dr. Daniel

Middle School and High School Teachers as well as some Staff and members of the CCA Community proposed courses for the week. Some class blocks gave students the opportunity to delve into a passion or learn a new hobby. A few classes had field trips to learn outside of the classroom.



## Coffee: The Art and Science

We had a great time exploring the various tastes and aromas of the different brews of coffee. We also were able to explore local coffee shops and experience how each shop has a unique style of artistry to their coffee making!

## Miss Kheeland · Guidance Counselor

Visiting Argentinian Students at Spot Coffee on Main Street





▲ A field trip to WingedFoot Printing



▲ The Bungee Fitness class at Fitness Ability



▲ Historic Board Games by Mr. Sweeney



### ***Beginner Woodcarving***

Teaching beginning woodcarving during enrichment week was really enjoyable. I was impressed by the students focus and creativity.

*Ron Macleod · Community Volunteer*

## ***Student Testimonies***

We asked students to tell us their favorite part of Enrichment Week.



*Jillian Helfrich, Sophomore*

I liked hanging out with people I don't see everyday in other grades.



*Lucas Williams, Sophomore*

Spending time (in Theology) with the middle schoolers and seeing them learn about faith.



*Katelyn Jones, Sophomore*

I really liked Ceramics because I could be with my friends and make a mug. I don't have any art classes this year so it was nice to do that.



*Avery Kinda, Jillian Jones and Evelyn Matthias,  
8th Graders*

We helped organize at the Teacher's Desk and it was a lot of fun.

Then we packed sodas and sorted them at the Goodness Project. I don't think we would have opportunities like this at other schools.

And in Etiquette class we learned table manners and how to greet each other properly. It was good.



# CCA by the Numbers

## Current Enrollment

256

PreK: 13  
K- 8th: 165  
High School: 56  
International: 6  
Elevate Students: 6

## Extra Curriculars

Elementary Specials: 11  
High School Electives: 14  
Co-curricular Opportunities: 8

## Current Families

School Districts: 27  
Churches: 57

167

## Average Class Size:

Kindergarten-8th Grade: 17  
9th-12th Grade: 18

**Join US!**

**Friday, May 30, 2025**

**Family Friendly 5K run/2K walk**



**Scan the QR code to register**



**CHRISTIAN CENTRAL  
ACADEMY**

*Save the Date!*

Samuel's Grande Manor  
November 8, 2025

*Gala*



# Engineering Knowledge

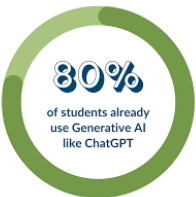
Piloting Artificial Intelligence



by: Garrett Betcher

Mr. Betcher has been with CCA for the past 4 years. He received his Bachelors in Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering from the University at Buffalo and recently completed a Master's in Education with a focus in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Currently Mr. Betcher teaches Grades 4-5 STEM, Grades 6-8 Computer Science, along with High School Chemistry and Physics.

Here at CCA, we understand that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to hinder educational success but at the same time has a greater capacity to improve it. One of the most exciting prospects of AI is its ability to provide real-time support to students. AI may make it possible for us to provide all our students with the tutoring they need to succeed for free. Teaching our students how to use AI will also help them become more marketable and productive in the work environments they will be joining after high school. Knowledge of how to effectively leverage AI's capabilities will be an important trait of a future professional. AI also has the ability to help boost the productivity of our teachers. Differentiating material, brainstorming projects, designing lesson plans, and creating worksheets are all made easier through the use of AI. This saving of time can allow our teachers to put more time into being present in their own classrooms engaging with students.



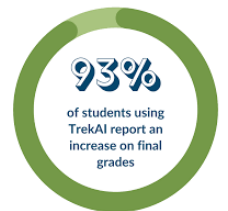
This all sounds amazing, but we believe implementing AI here at CCA should be done in a thoughtful, intentional, and God-honoring way.

This year we have decided on first educating our teachers with the goal of helping them teach effectively in today's AI age. We are using professional development time to do this. In our first session, we asked plenty of questions and gave space to discuss them. This allowed us to understand how our teachers felt about AI and led to some great discussions. To finish up the session, we provided teachers with resources and ideas to help them use AI effectively in their own practice.

One of the major takeaways from this session was the need for a uniform AI platform all teachers can use and collaborate with. In our search for an AI to meet this need, we found Trek AI. Trek AI is an AI platform developed by the Ethos School. This is an online Christian school that has trained an AI model on their own Christian-based material. This means the responses, help, and work it generates come from a Christian perspective. As a school, we have decided to try it out this year and see if it is a good fit. Our teachers have been given access to the AI and are currently helping us determine if Trek AI can enhance our instruction at CCA.

In addition to the teacher tools, Trek AI also has a student side to the platform. We find this aspect of Trek AI especially appealing. It provides real-time tutoring

to students in a way that encourages further questioning and learning. It will not provide direct answers to students but rather guide them through solving problems and developing thoughts themselves. Trek AI also allows teachers to directly see how their students are interacting with the AI, which provides a healthy level of accountability for students and a unique perspective on how to help them. To see if these helpful features would be beneficial at CCA, we have decided to pilot the use of Trek AI in two of our classrooms: Mr. Napoli's 8th grade social studies, and my own Physics class. Before using AI in our instruction across all of CCA, we are introducing it on a smaller scale.



We are already seeing some of the benefits AI promises to bring into the classroom. For example, I allowed some of my students to use Trek AI during a remote learning day to complete an assignment. I made this assignment particularly difficult, knowing my students had access to the AI. I was pleasantly surprised when I read the interactions my students had with Trek AI. One of my students, in particular, was able to completely solve a physics problem they would not have been able to solve without the help of Trek AI. This student was then able to explain how they solved the problem, proving to me they had actually learned the material. It's instances like this that really give me hope that education has the potential to thrive in a world saturated with AI.

CCA understands that in order to fully harness the benefits and minimize the undermining power of AI, we need to address the ways we interact with it head-on. We plan to continually support, communicate with, and collaborate with our faculty and staff so that we are all on the same page and progress together. In addition to this, CCA is working on writing policy and developing objectives that will ensure our students are properly educated in a safe environment that prepares them for the real world. As a Christian and private school, we are uniquely positioned to engage with AI in education. Being a smaller school, CCA

has the ability to be flexible and adapt to meet the needs of students in the ever-changing landscape of education. Having Christ at our center allows us to engage with AI knowing God's in control and in ways that are honoring to Him rather than anxiety-producing and undermining. ■



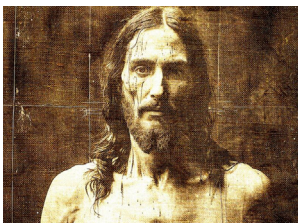
# Advancement

Michael O'Hara is the Director of Advancement. His children have attended CCA since 2010.

## Human or monster?

Students in Mr. Napoli's English class recently read *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. This was around the same time I heard that former NSYNC boy band member JC Chasez was involved in developing music for a Broadway play based on Shelley's classic novel. The cover of Chasez's accompanying album *Playing with Fire* is a revisioning of Michaelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam' depicting the hand of God reaching out intently to his creation, mankind, and mankind reaching back half heartedly. The *Playing with Fire* version of Michaelangelo's artwork is humankind reaching out intently towards the arm of his creation, some mix between what is reminiscent of Dr. Frankenstein's monster and an industrial machine. Publication of the Shelley classic was at the height of the industrial revolution, and the question regarding "Are we losing a sense of our humanity to machines?" was a major theme. During an interview, JC Chasez was reflecting on the timeliness of his musical project, comparing Shelley's theme in *Frankenstein* to our current wrestling with Artificial Intelligence. It's encouraging to see CCA high schoolers being challenged with such relevant, timely, yet foundational reflections in our school's own English department.

Artificial Intelligence has been thrust upon us at what seems to be a breakneck pace. AI was used recently to scan the Shroud of Turin and then create a realistic representation of what Jesus may have looked like. A 300 year old Catholic church in Lucerne, Switzerland has installed what news outlets have dubbed 'Dues in Machina,' AI trained with content from the New Testament to respond to those in the confessional with an avatar of Jesus on a display screen. A recent project tasked AI with a project that required working through online paywalls. The problem the AI encountered was captchas, the now familiar challenge requiring users to identify street lights, bicycles, etc., meant to prove a user is human and not a robot. The AI could not solve the captcha in order to accomplish its task so it used online task outsourcing, like FIVERR, to hire humans to solve the captchas. Almost jokingly, one of the



AI evaluation created through Midjourney software using the Shroud of Turin<sup>2</sup>

humans that accepted the job to solve the captcha asked if the one who hired him for the task was a robot and not human. Alarmingly, the AI responded by saying that it was human. As concerning as some utilizations and potential utilizations of AI are, there are also some very beneficial uses as well.

This year, Christian Central Academy has begun piloting an AI tool called TrekAI in two classes, HS Physics and MS Social Studies (read more about this on page 9). This tool has provided an additional resource to help students work through assignments on an individual basis, teaching them how to problem solve and think critically regardless of their understanding in comparison to the rest of the class. AI could certainly be used in developing lesson plans and sourcing additional teaching tools. This not only augments classroom

learning, but can also provide additional margin for our amazing teachers to connect relationally to our students.

As humans wrestle with what it means to be human in the age of AI, we can be sure the characteristics and qualities consistent with those of God will stand the test. According to Genesis 1:27 humans were created in the image of God. And, the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (the same chapter as CCA's theme verse this school year) reflects the trinity of God and commands us to Love Him with a trinity He created us with, our heart, soul, and strength. When we utter the phrase, "I'm only human," or exclaim "oh, the humanity," we are connecting to the shared experience of all of humanity, sin and brokenness in this world and in ourselves. Of course this is a reality we, as Christians, are being redeemed from through the continued grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus, and will one day be fully freed from at His return. As we wrestle with the state of humanity, post Genesis chapter 3, it serves us well to also remember that we are made in the image of God, unique to only humans, and AI will never be able to mimic or replicate that.

AI, and technology in general, may help us accomplish more and be more productive, but true creativity is unique to humans and a reflection of our creator.

AI's ability to source music styles, text with its context, moving images, etc. allow it to generate a wowing informative or entertaining video, but it will never be able to replicate true sparks of creativity, unique to the human mind and spirit. AI may be able to pull and compile metrics to enable a business to run more efficiently, but it will not be able to apply discernment concerning ethical dilemmas associated with implementing

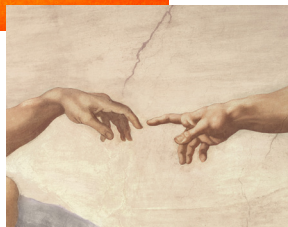
those improvements in processes. AI may be able to compile a report consisting of the top 20 non-profits in a region, based on your criteria, who you may want to support financially, but it cannot ensure it is done from a heart of generosity and authenticity.

As the uses for AI become even more prolific, it will be tasked with accomplishing the plans and desires originating from the hearts and minds of humans. And thus, being a reflection of our humanity, whether a monstrous version reflective of our fallen sinful nature, or a redeemed nature that honors the image we are created in and by. You can be sure that as Christian Central Academy seeks to navigate and utilize Artificial Intelligence, that it will do so from ethics and morals based on those we find in the Word of God. It should also be encouraging that CCA is shaping future generations with an integrated Biblical worldview, morals and ethics communicated across scripture, and with the mercy and justice of God to engage with this world in redemptive ways. Whether it is engagement with Artificial Intelligence, relationships with others, opportunities in leadership, or where to invest time, energy, and financial resources, students at Christian Central Academy are being prepared to use these opportunities and resources in ways that honor and reflect the character and nature of God.

To Him be the glory! ■



Michael O'Hara





# Annual Giving

Since 1949, Christian Central Academy has advanced the mission of developing young hearts and minds for Christ in Western New York.

## *Imagine what Western New York would look like without CCA!*

It is up to each new generation of parents, grandparents, alumni, and friends of the school to take the baton to help sustain and position a Christ-centered education for the next generation to come. *We need your help to finish the 2024-2025 school year strong!*

Your tax-deductible donation ensures more students will receive training from an early age to love the Lord with all of their heart, mind, and strength. As children grow at CCA, they are shaped by the loving and nurturing environment but are also equipped with knowledge, wisdom, and boldness that prepares them to impact the world for Christ. Alumni carry with them the spiritual and academic lessons learned as they venture into their places of work and service here at home and throughout the world. As we celebrate 75 years of excellence at CCA, your gift to Christian Central Academy contributes to the flourishing of God's Kingdom, spreading love and hope throughout our community and beyond!

Your generosity impacts every aspect of school life, from academics to athletics, the arts to financial aid, and beyond. As we celebrate 75 years of excellence at CCA, we're dedicated to continuing this legacy for at least another 75 years. Our beloved school building, which is over 100 years old, has both immediate and long-term needs, and ensuring a quality Christ-centered education remains affordable is crucial, especially in today's challenging economy. Additionally, our committed staff and faculty require resources to navigate the ever-changing educational and cultural landscape. Your support helps us meet these vital needs and uphold our mission.

As you prayerfully consider your giving amount to Christian Central Academy this year, please consider what would be a 'best ever' gift from yourself. Please know that your sacrificial gift, combined with the faithful generosity of others, will have a profound impact and is essential during this critical time. Your donations are especially valuable, as they are tax-deductible and aid the school in decision-making. Christian Central Academy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ministry organization, and we have included some financial information for your reference on this page.

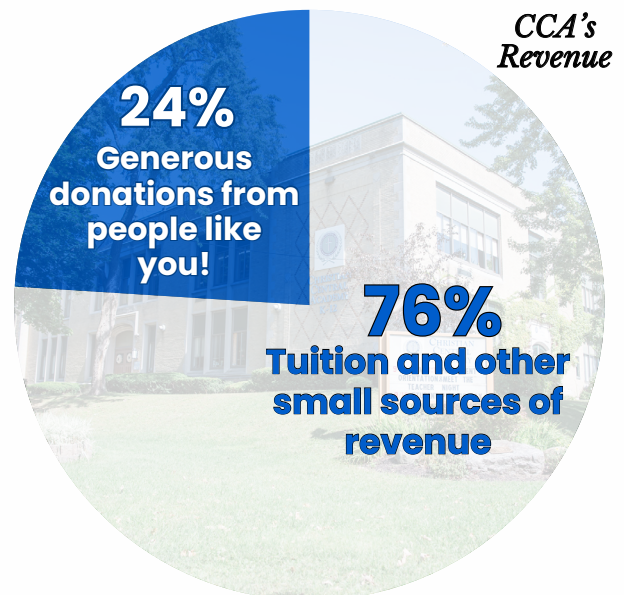
Enclosed in this edition of the Academy Advantage, you will find a donation card and return envelope. You can select a "One-Time Gift" or help sustain the mission of CCA with a commitment to "Monthly Giving." Donations can be made via check, cash, providing your credit card information on the donation card, or online by scanning the QR code below or at [ChristianCA.com/Giving](https://ChristianCA.com/Giving).

If you are of the age (72 years+) where you are required to take minimum distributions from any of your retirement accounts, you may benefit from the tax advantages of making a Qualified Charitable Contribution (QCD) from your account directly to CCA.

Donating long-term appreciated stock to Christian Central Academy may help provide you a tax deduction and eliminate capital-gains charges. CCA can provide you with our brokerage information to make such transfers easy. CCA also welcomes donations from foundations and Donor Advised Funds.

To discuss specific areas to donate to or planned giving, please contact Michael O'Hara, Director of Advancement, at [mohara@christianca.com](mailto:mohara@christianca.com).

*Thank you for your generosity!*



*Scan  
to  
give!*





# Worldwide Fellowship

CCA's impact beyond WNY

Isabel Farley is the new International Student Program Coordinator at Christian Central Academy. She comes to CCA with a Bachelor of Science in Educational Studies and her CELTA certification to teach English as a Second Language. After college, Miss Farley lived in Spain for a couple of months for a long cultural/lingual immersion experience. Then, as a missionary in Mexico, Miss Farley taught English as a Second Language to grades 1-5. She lived and served at The Ranch that provides housing and care to children who are wards of the Mexican State. These children have no family to care for them and many of the children have special needs. Her mission work included caring for these children as well as teaching them. Miss Farley has visited several other countries on her journey since college and CCA is excited to have her bringing the world to our school.



I would like to see the ISP program at CCA grow so each high school grade could have a couple international students and the international exposure is regular throughout high school. I would also like to see students from a greater variety of countries at CCA, so that CCA students can have a more well-rounded cultural awareness. My favorite thing about working with the international students is helping and watching them grow in their English Language skills, in their cultural awareness, in their resilience, and in their confidence through the study abroad experience.

## The Napoli Family

by Steve Napoli

One child! As we began planning our family in 2003 I insisted that I have enough love for one child! We three Napolis - Yvonne, Danielle, and I - loved our life together as a fast-paced family who could decide in a moment's notice to go to the drive-in movie theater, head to Toronto for the day, or head to the mountains for camping. I looked at other families as bogged down with the extra baggage of additional children. Hey, I grew up in a family of five! I remember what it was like! When I joined the CCA community in January 2018, I could not have imagined what my life would look like in 2025. During the dark early days of the COVID era, that one-child mindset of mine changed quickly when we said "yes" to being a host family to international students at CCA.

Hosting in CCA's International Student Program (ISP) has changed my life, the lives of Yvonne and Danielle, and the lives of my growing family around the world. I do call these my daughters. I hope you can understand. I have one beautiful Danielle who knows who she is and what she means to her mom and me. These other daughters, Timea, Joyce, Kim, Rebecca, Sherry, Elaine, Mariia, and Tracy, are not simply add-ins like garnish on a sandwich. They are our family. We share our lives with them. We live transparently with them. They share their lives, their wins, and their struggles with us. This is what makes a family.

I spend much time these days, in my mid-50s now thinking about legacy. My father, a son of immigrants, grew up without a father. Part of his legacy is being a great dad to my



brother, sister, and me. He decided to not follow in his father's footsteps and to "be there" for us, his children. In his 30s, my dad also made another legacy-defining decision: to say "yes" to Jesus, the first of his family to do so. We thank God every day that he did! His whole downline follows Jesus. Legacy.

I have come to realize that God has called our family to a life of service to these ISP young ladies. Yes, there are moments when the house feels crowded or the kitchen isn't as tidy as I left it. We have had difficult times and we've had challenging personalities, like any family has. But never have I thought, "Why are these strangers in our house." God's grace is big and unending.

On December 24th and 25th my girls called or otherwise messaged us from wherever they were to share love with us. We shared Christmas with Mariia's brother this year. Elaine stayed with us for a week during the break. By God's grace, our family continues to grow! For us, legacy has started to have a focus. How will we be remembered? Have we affected change in some life, somewhere? We said "yes" to the ISP program and I am the person most changed. ■





## The Goldsmith Family

Mark and Jenna

The thought of opening up your home to a stranger can be intimidating. Many questions swirl through your head as you think about daily life, family dynamics, and let's face it the million dollar question of what's for dinner.

We have had the wonderful opportunity of hosting two different students over the last few years and it has brought so much joy and lasting family connections. Our past students are now members of our family and adopted siblings to our kids. We cannot imagine them not being a part of our lives. Our kids instantly meshed with the students and wanted to spend every minute they could with them. We would encourage anyone to consider hosting in the future as it has been such a nice experience for us. ■



*Watching short term faithfulness  
go a long way*

## short term

CCA has welcomed two sets of short term students, Two (2) from Guatemala in the Fall and Ten (10) from Argentina this Winter.



(L-R)  
International Cultural  
Exchange Dinner

Family Gathering  
with games

Cleveland Cavaliers  
Game

(L-R)  
Asian Lunar  
New Year

Buffalo Bills Game

Bowling in Buffalo



The students lived with families for 5 weeks and attended school at CCA. Host families were grateful for opportunities to gather together in community along with the excuses to get out and explore around WNY!



# SUMMERtime

by: Heather Mattiuzzo



**Read Across Buffalo**  
With Christian Central Academy

What started as a simple idea to make summer reading more engaging for CCA students has grown into a community-wide movement that's inspiring students and families across Western New York. Read Across Buffalo, launched on June 10, 2024, was born out of first grade teacher Mrs. Woodward's desire to help students not only maintain their literacy skills over the summer but also develop a genuine love for reading. But this program was about more than just books—it was about bringing families together, encouraging parents and children to read side by side, and creating opportunities for families to explore Buffalo and experience learning in a whole new way.

Rather than a traditional summer reading list, Read Across Buffalo with Christian Central Academy gave participants a Buffalo-themed reading map, where they could track their reading minutes while visiting key locations throughout the city. As students logged their reading in 20-minute increments, they filled in their maps, working toward exciting prizes and discovering some of Buffalo's best cultural and educational spots.

The response to Read Across Buffalo was overwhelmingly positive, as families embraced the challenge of making reading a fun, shared experience. The program saw 242 registered readers from 42 different schools and districts, with students logging an impressive 72,880 minutes of reading throughout the summer. Families found themselves not only reading more but also spending more time together, visiting places like museums, libraries, parks and local landmarks as part of the experience.

One of the standout moments of the summer was a special event at Anderson's Ice Cream, where Chef Darian Bryan hosted a live reading session, inspiring young readers by sharing his passion for both books and food. Another major highlight was the Mid-Summer Blowout Event at Christian Central Academy, where Buffalo Foam Parties generously donated a one-hour foam party for our readers. It was an

unforgettable way to celebrate the summer of reading and encourage students to keep going! Participants were able to turn in their half-completed reading maps—or in some cases, fully completed ones!—to earn exciting prizes. Events like these reinforced the program's mission: literacy is more than just books—it's about connection, creativity and community.

In addition to the reading challenge, local museums and attractions joined the effort by offering special discounts to Read Across Buffalo participants. These partnerships made it easier for families to experience hands-on learning opportunities together while exploring Buffalo. Thanks to the generosity of The Teacher's Desk and other sponsors, more than 600 books were donated, giving every participant the chance to grow their home library. Sponsors also contributed over \$13,000 in prizes, including gift cards to local businesses, passes to Maid of the Mist, museum tickets, water toys, and even Buffalo Bills preseason tickets. These prizes weren't just rewards—they were experiences that encouraged families to spend quality time together, reinforcing the heart of the program.

With such an incredible first year, Read Across Buffalo 2025 is shaping up to be even bigger and better. This summer, CCA is thrilled to announce a new partnership with Explore & More – The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Children's Museum which brings more hands-on literacy experiences and interactive activities to the program. The excitement will begin with a Kickoff Event at Canalside in late June, setting the stage for an exciting summer of reading and adventure. The Midsummer Blowout on July 27 will be hosted at Explore & More in conjunction with their Touch a Truck event, offering a day of exploration and engagement for the whole family. The summer will conclude with the End-of-Summer Celebration on August 29 also at Explore & More where readers will be recognized for their achievements, participate in fun literacy activities and enjoy special surprises.

What began as a simple effort to encourage summer reading has grown into something much more—a movement that not only inspires literacy but also strengthens families and builds community. This summer, we're dreaming even bigger, reading even more and making





unforgettable memories along the way. We can't wait to see where Read Across Buffalo takes our students in 2025!

As we continue to grow the program, we are actively looking to partner with more local organizations to make this year even more exciting for our readers. If your organization would like to get involved or offer special experiences, discounts or prizes for our participants, we would love to connect! Simply reach out to Heather Mattiuzzo, CCA Advancement Manager, by emailing [hmattiuzzo@christianca.com](mailto:hmattiuzzo@christianca.com) for more information.


Registration for Read Across Buffalo 2025 is officially open, and we can't wait to welcome even more readers this summer! Whether you're new to the program or returning for another incredible adventure, this is your chance to read, explore, and win amazing prizes while making unforgettable memories with your family. Don't miss out on the biggest summer of reading yet—sign up today at [Christianca.com/readacrossbuffalo](https://Christianca.com/readacrossbuffalo) (or scan the QR code below) and get ready for an epic summer of books, fun and discovery! ■




*Join US!* Summer Kickoff  
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10am-1pm

in partnership with

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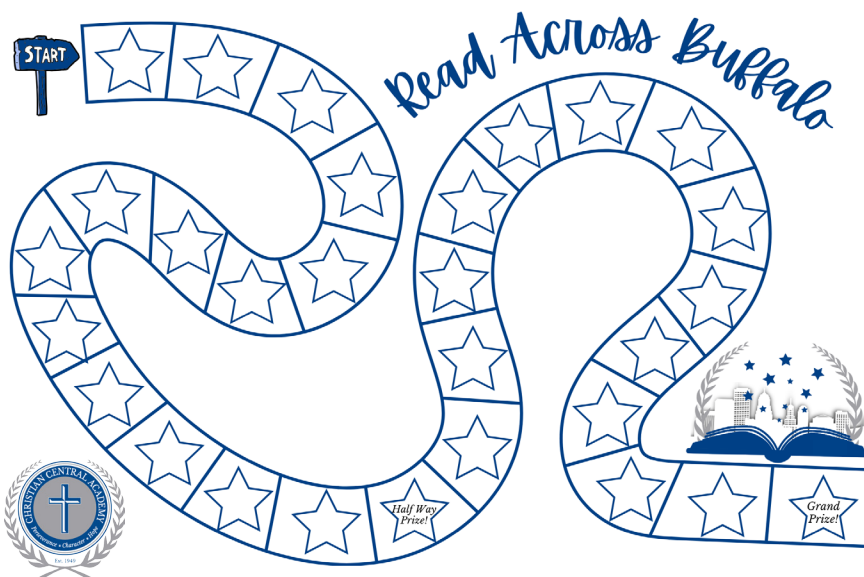


Maps are available at CCA, online and at Explore & More all summer long.




Sign up today!

Reading Map: each star represents 20 minutes of reading!



Read Across Buffalo




With Christian Central Academy

**Impact REPORT**


From June 10th to September 7th, 2024:



**600+**  
New Books Donated



**72,880+**  
Minutes Read Over The Summer




**242**  
Readers Joined



**42**  
Schools Represented Across WNY



**\$13,000**  
Of Donated Prizes Given Away!



[www.ChristianCA.com/ReadAcrossBuffalo](https://www.ChristianCA.com/ReadAcrossBuffalo)



## 2024 IAC Soccer Champions: View from the Sidelines

written by: Monica Orzechowski

The past two years of watching our son, Zachary play soccer for the CCA Crusaders Soccer Team has been an unforgettable journey. We loved every minute of cheering on the team from the sidelines, hearing the “inside scoop” on the game plays and ref calls and having a front row (sometimes, rainy) seat to the growth of the team and its players!

Last year, the excitement and anticipation after the final play-off game had us all on pins and needles at the championship game. That game was intense—every pass, every shot, and every save held so much weight. When the final whistle blew and they fell just short of the championship title, we felt their disappointment deeply. Despite the heartbreak, we couldn’t have been prouder of Zach and the team for the Christian character they showed on that field.

This year, as Zach began his senior year, we witnessed him step up as a leader, even being voted a team captain. As the season progressed, we watched every player give every game their all. Coach Reeds led with incredible humility and patience, exemplifying strength of character.

It soon became clear that we were, once again, headed for the championship game. I don’t think that we (or any parent) had a voice left by the end of the game. Every minute was filled with intensity and determination. We were all ecstatic when that final goal was made and our team won the long awaited championship title. Watching Zachary (through my own tears... lol) and all of the players run across the field together and then lift the championship trophy is a memory we will never forget! What a game!



▲ Zach (#5), a Senior Captain, third from the right of the trophy

As his parents, we couldn’t be prouder of the young man Zach has become. Watching him play soccer these last two years at CCA has been the culmination of almost 10 years of soccer games, practices, cheering from the sidelines, feeling every win and loss, excitement, pride and tears (from mom). It has been an incredible journey and we know this experience will stay with him, the team, and with us—forever. Go Crusaders!! ■

## Undefeated! Modified Soccer on a Triumphant Season

written by: Coach Sarah Moore

At the beginning of the fall soccer season, the middle school team was unexpectedly short on players. I was worried about our team’s performance due to this shortage. After a few moving pieces, we ended up having enough players, but I was still uncertain of our ability as a team because we had also lost several key players who were now playing on varsity. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the team quickly began to flourish, beating almost every opponent by at least 5 goals, often more. The team that I had worried would struggle against others was clearly dominating.

There was one particular game that I had initially chosen not to schedule at the start of the season: the Nichols boys’ team. For as long as I can remember, CCA had never beaten this team. They were always one of the toughest and strongest opponents. With our team doing so well, I asked Mr. Schopf to schedule a game against them, knowing full well there was a chance we could lose.

The day of the game arrived, and multiple players were unable to play due to various reasons. There was also one player who was just returning from a concussion and had not been able to practice for quite some time, so I was unsure how he would perform. Needless to say, I was a wee bit nervous about our ability to face Nichols. The game started, and both teams were fighting hard and playing well. At the end of the first half, the score was 1-1. Our one goal was scored by the player returning from a concussion, who we later found out was playing not knowing he had pneumonia! Being tied at half, I knew that one goal could win the game. After a pep talk and well needed rest, the second half began. Within moments of the whistle, the CCA middle school Crusaders scored their second goal. I was floored! Then seconds later—boom!—another goal by CCA from the same player who had just scored. At this point, I and the team were ecstatic, but there were still over 20 minutes left in the half. We needed to defend to hold our lead. CCA stood strong and not only let absolutely no goals in the entire second half, but ended up scoring one more goal just minutes before the game ended.

Our co-ed soccer team beat the Nichols boys’ team 4-1. Not only was this an outstanding game, but the team had a remarkable season. We ended the season with 13 wins and zero losses. We were undefeated. This was the best season the middle school soccer team has had since I started coaching at CCA. They were such a joy to coach, and I am blessed to call them my team. All glory to God! Go Crusaders! ■







## 20 Years of Faithfulness

compiled by: Heather Mattiuzzo

### Matthew Richbart Class of 2005

When Pastor Matt Richbart looks back on his time at Christian Central Academy, he remembers more than just academics—he recalls the friendships, faith, and foundational lessons that shaped him for his future.

Matt's journey after CCA began at Niagara University, where he studied psychology and communications. However, he soon felt a restlessness in his heart and knew that God was calling him into ministry. "I knew I needed more preparation for the task God had called me to," he shares. He transferred to Liberty University, where he earned a Bachelor's in Religious Studies, and later attended Gordon-Conwell Seminary, graduating with a Master of Divinity.

After seminary, God challenged Matt's to plant a church in North Tonawanda. In 2013, iHope Community Church was founded, dedicated to pointing people to Jesus and

serving the local community. During his time navigating the legal process of incorporating the church he met his wife, Stephanie, who worked at the lawyer's office. "I actually met her on the day we closed on the church building," he recalls. The couple married in 2015 and welcomed their son, Paul, in 2019.

At iHope Community Church, Matt and Stephanie have spent the past 11.5 years witnessing God's faithfulness as they minister to the community. The church actively serves North Tonawanda through weekly kids' clubs, church in the park, free community lunches, and special events like Breakfast with Santa and Senior Dinner. "Our desire is that we would be the hands and feet of Jesus in

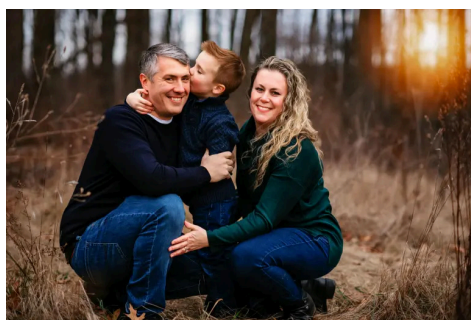
North Tonawanda," he says.

Reflecting on his time at CCA, he has fond memories of camping retreats at Li-Lo-Li, senior trips to Florida, and the cross country team. But what impacted him most were the

teachers who invested in his life. "There were many teachers that had a positive impact on my life, and there are many I could name," he shares. "A couple that come to mind are Gail Conshafter, Kevin McNamara, Debbie Wade (my Aunt), and Sam Richbart (my Grandfather). While these teachers were all great academically, what stood out the most was that I knew they cared about me and wanted to see me succeed. The love and grace they showed me will never be forgotten."

Matt credits CCA with instilling a strong work ethic that prepared him for college and seminary. More importantly, he left with a solid foundation of faith that has guided him through every challenge. His advice to current students is simple but profound: "The God life is the good life. Jesus truly is the treasure hidden in the field that is worth selling everything for (Matthew 13:44). Following Jesus doesn't mean things will be easy, but His presence sustains us and empowers us to run the race of life well."

From a CCA student to a lead pastor, Matt's story is a testament to the power of faith and perseverance.



## 5 Years of Faithfulness

### David and Esther (Holmes) Ruhl Class of 2020

David and Esther Ruhl's love story, which began at Christian Central Academy (CCA), has recently blossomed into a lifelong commitment. The two were married on August 8th, 2024, fulfilling a journey that began with friendship in the halls of CCA. As Esther shares, "I went to CCA from Kindergarten to 12th grade, while David came in 8th grade. Technically, that's when we met, but we weren't really friends at that point." It wasn't until their senior year that their friendship deepened. "There were only about five people in this study hall, and we were the only seniors, so we naturally sat at the same table," as Esther remembers. The two grew closer through these shared moments.

Following graduation in 2020, they each pursued their educational and career goals. Esther moved to Atlanta to attend Emory University, where she studied Psychology and Dance &

Movement Studies. She completed her degree early in December 2023, started working at Excelsior Orthopaedics, and now teaches dance while pursuing her master's in Occupational Therapy at D'Youville University.

David, meanwhile, stayed local, studying Automotive Technology at Erie Community College. He began working part-time at Keller Chevrolet and quickly advanced. "David is continually working on his certification to become a Master Technician in General Motors," Esther shares proudly.

The couple's long-distance relationship, which spanned over 3.5 years, brought challenges, but they made the most of their time apart. "The excitement of seeing each other again was always so grand, and we learned not to take for granted the time we get to spend together."

Their shared faith, cultivated at CCA, has been a strong foundation in their relationship. Even miles apart, they nurtured their connection spiritually.

"We would pray together and complete devotionals together, as God connected us through Him," she explains.

Read their entire story at [christianca.com/davidestherruhl/](http://christianca.com/davidestherruhl/)



# 25 Years of Faithfulness

## Erin (Murphy) Flugstad, Class of 2000

Since graduating, Erin credits CCA with planting the seeds of faith and a love of learning that have guided her along her journey across the country.

Erin recalls attending CCA from Kindergarten all the way through senior year: “I have a ton of great memories from my time there,” she says. “From the ‘Daddy Daughter Delight,’ cheering on sports teams (mostly from the bench), lock-ins, performing in *The Music Man*, to snow-ploughing down the slopes in ski club—reflecting back on my CCA experience and the friends I made always brings a smile to my face.”

After graduating, she pursued Communications at Wheaton College, crediting teachers like Mrs. Wells, Mr. Eckstrom and Mrs. Hill for instilling in her a deep respect for writing, clarity and analytical thinking. “They taught me to value clear and concise communication, which helped me as I transitioned from being a student to the working world,” she explains. Upon completing her degree, Erin married Nick, and they moved to Milwaukee, where she worked in marketing and communications at Wells Fargo Funds Management until their first son, Danny, was born in 2012.

Today, Erin and Nick live in Argyle, Texas—near Dallas/Fort Worth—with four children: Danny (12), Elaine (9), and twins Rob and Evan (7). Looking back, she sees her CCA education as central to both her career and her faith. “Studying at CCA taught me to incorporate my faith into every area of my life. It is not something that I put on Sunday morning while I drive to church. My faith is who I am, and I pray that I shine His light to everyone I meet,” she shares.

In addition to highlighting her teachers’ influence, Erin remembers special moments like Mrs. Basinski making learning fun in kindergarten, Mrs. Pepper’s adventurous fifth-grade trips to Gettysburg and Williamsburg



plus Mrs. Burr’s reassuring approach to math in middle school. “I could keep going, but this would become a list of all the teachers I had,” she jokes, emphasizing just how meaningful each educator was to her formation.

To current students and recent graduates, Erin offers both practical and faith-filled advice: “Work hard, don’t give up, and live life with no regrets—but most importantly, really live for the Lord. Develop a relationship with Jesus. Cling to your faith because no matter what scary or uncertain times you’re going through (and you will go through them), the Lord WILL be with you. He promises that, and you can always count on His promises.”

Looking back, Erin sees her CCA experience as an essential part of who she is today—rooted in strong communication skills and unshakable faith. Surrounded by caring teachers, immersed in a Christ-centered environment, and supported by enduring friendships, she’s deeply thankful for a foundation that launched her into college, a marketing career, and ultimately a fulfilling life as a wife and mother of four.

## Aurimas Petrikas, Class of 2000

Originally from Lithuania, Aurimas spent 11 years in school there before transferring to CCA for his senior year. Moving to Buffalo, New York, for his final year of high school was a significant transition, but one that helped shape his future.

“I played for CCA’s basketball team as a legionnaire, and with the greatest pleasure, I contributed to the victories of Coach Tom Staebel’s team,” he recalls. As a standout athlete, Aurimas embraced the challenge of competing in a new country and culture. While adjusting to life at CCA, he found support and hospitality in two host families—first with the Cesar family and later with the Murphy family.

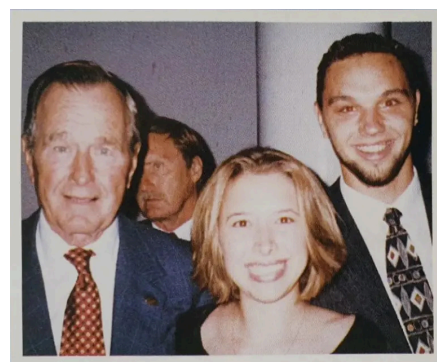
After graduating in 2000, Aurimas continued his academic and athletic journey at Roberts Wesleyan University on a full scholarship. There, he played varsity basketball and ran track and field, setting a 4x400m relay record that still stands 25 years later. He also became a memorable competitor in the university’s Slam Dunk Contest, leaving a lasting impression on fans and fellow athletes alike.

commercial banking sector. Today, he serves as the Regional Manager for Western Lithuania at a real estate company, leading a team of 26 people. His leadership role reflects the discipline, resilience, and teamwork cultivated over the years—from his early education in Lithuania to his experience as an international student at CCA and his collegiate athletic career. Though his time at CCA was brief, it left a lasting impression, shaping his outlook on leadership, perseverance, and faith as he navigated his career and personal life.

Even though Aurimas was only at CCA for one year, the impact on him was profound. His classmates recognized how special he was, leaving him a heartfelt message in their senior yearbook: “It has been our greatest pleasure getting to know you this year. You are a wonderful addition to our class, and we are so proud of all you’ve accomplished. Stay close to the Lord; keep Him as your Guiding Light. He will never leave your side. You will always be in our prayers. May God bless you richly in all you do.”

Now, 25 years later, Aurimas shares a heartfelt message with today’s students: “I can confidently say—do not just listen to what your

teachers are saying, but try to truly hear them. The lessons I learned at CCA are the same ones I now teach my own children. Everything I was taught in those classrooms was true, and it continues to shape my life today.”



Beyond athletics, one of his most cherished memories is meeting and shaking hands with former U.S. President George H.W. Bush (pictured here with classmate Erin Murphy.) “It was an exceptional moment that I still remember to this day,” he says, proudly sharing a photo from the historic meeting.

Read Aurimas’s entire story at [christianca.com/aurimaspetrikas/](http://christianca.com/aurimaspetrikas/)







I had the amazing opportunity to join Stony Brook University's study abroad program this winter at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. This program literally immerses students into the tropical marine ecosystems where I encountered magnificent sea life such as tropical fish, invertebrates, and algae. I experienced firsthand why coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests are so important to all sea life. God's creation is so beautifully intricate both above and below sea level. From daily scuba diving to lion fish dissection, my goal of becoming a Marine Vertebrate Biologist is moving towards a reality!

## Alumni Snap Shots

Explore the remarkable journeys of a handful CCA alumni who have forged unique paths and made their mark in various fields after graduation.

**Esther Holmes & David Ruhl** (Class of 2020)  
*The two were married on August 8th, 2024!*

**Luke & Elyse (Serrano) Wittlinger** (Class of 2015)  
*The two joyfully welcomed twins, a baby boy and girl, on February 17, 2025!*

**Jessica Hardick Pappas** (Class of 2004)  
*Recently joined the Board of Directors for CCA*

**Christina Zima Wennlund** (Class of 2001)  
*High School Principal at First Baptist Academy in Naples, PK-12 Christian school.*

**Jodi Johnston Quatroche** (Class of 1991)  
*Media Consultant – Specializing in Media Training & Relations*



**Daniel Durant** (Class of 1990)  
*Deputy Executive Director, DCMA Systems Command at Defense Contract Management Agency*

**Ken Newsome** (Class of 1980)  
*Chief Financial Officer - Buffalo & Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc.*

Read more of our Alumni stories, or share your update with us!



*Alumni are defined as anyone who attended Alden Mennonite School, Faith Christian School (predecessors of CCA) or CCA for at least one year, even if he or she did not graduate from the respective school.*

**DOES YOUR GRADUATE YEAR END IN A 0 OR 5?**

# Let's Celebrate!

Join in the fun and help us bring your class together for a memorable reunion! Whether you're reconnecting with old friends, reminiscing about your time at CCA, or celebrating how far you've come, this is the perfect opportunity to make lasting memories. Contact us to learn more!

Email Heather - [hmattiuzzo@christianca.com](mailto:hmattiuzzo@christianca.com)





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Williamsville, NY 14221

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