

Join us!

Oct. 11, 15 & 28, 9-10 a.m. – Kindergarten Open House for parents and guardians

Oct. 18-19 – Homecoming.
See back page

Nov. 1-3 – High school play, *Clue*,
Fri. and Sat., 7 p.m. Sun., 3 p.m.
easternmennonite.org/tickets

**Oct. 25, Nov. 4, Jan. 22, Feb. 18,
Mar. 28, 8:15-10 a.m.** – Visit
dates for middle and high
school prospective students.
easternmennonite.org/visit

Dec. 5, 7 p.m. – Choral Christmas
Worship Service with Touring,
Chamber, and Concert Choirs,
and Middle School Chorale

Dec. 17, 7 p.m. – High school
instrumental Christmas concert

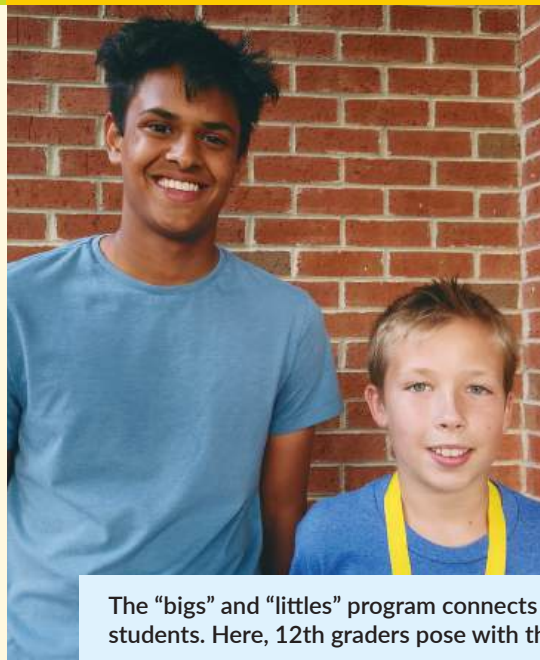
Feb. 27 - Mar. 2 – High school
musical, *Big Fish*

May 2 – Fore the Flames Alumni
Golf Tournament

News at
easternmennonite.org/news



Flames athletics schedules and
scores: [easternmennonite.org/
athletics](http://easternmennonite.org/athletics)



The “bigs” and “littles” program connects juniors and seniors with new middle school students. Here, 12th graders pose with their 6th grade “little” on back-to-school night.



Here's what HS Principal Justin King saw from students in the first two days of school:

Kindness. 11th and 12th grade students who are “bigs” lead personalized tours to their “little” throughout the school, and genuinely build positive relationships with them. I saw one new 7th grade girl sitting with her big today at the lunch table, and it almost brought a tear to my eye.

Initiative. A 10th grade student saw a middle school student ask me where a particular classroom was. Without any prodding from me, the student quickly jumped in and said, “I know where that is. Can I take you there?”

Joy. Teachers and students laughing together, students smiling in the hallways, and alumni returning to school to pick up their yearbooks and bringing gleeful hugs to friends and staff.

Executive Functions. Teachers are placing an emphasis this year (particularly in 9th and 10th grade) on teaching executive function skills through their efforts on adding clarity, routine, and modeling to everything they are doing. Parents of 9th and 10th graders, ask your students to show you their planner!

CELEBRATING ALUMNI STORIES

EMS celebrates alumni stories to learn from each others' journeys since high school. Michael, James, and Ashley will share brief reflections at the homecoming breakfast on Saturday, Oct. 18.

Stories written by Ryan Eshleman-Robles '09.



H. Michael Shenk '49

In elementary school, he was asked by a teacher what he wanted to be when he grew up. He recalls answering, "A teacher or a preacher." He appreciates that he got to do both. Shenk knows details without story can mean very little, so he weaves them into anecdotes full of meaning.

Throughout his rich life, Shenk has built a world of love and care by paying close attention to detail and sharing the encouragement he finds in them with others.

"EMC HIGH SCHOOL"

Shenk grew up with seven sisters, including his twin, H. Mabel Shenk '49 Baker, on a fruit and dairy farm. All except one of his siblings attended EMS – or "EMC high school, as it was known then," says Shenk – as dorm students. The sweltering peach season made heading to Harrisonburg in the fall all the sweeter. "It was like coming to a picnic – to get out of that hot peach orchard and come to a dormitory where you didn't have to get up at 5:30 a.m. to either milk cows or pick peaches, and you get to lay in bed until close to 7 a.m. and then run for breakfast," Shenk recalls.



1951 Michael and Peggy Shenk as sophomores on EMC campus

Photo courtesy of Michael Shenk

There became another sweet reason besides escaping the heat that Shenk looked forward to returning to EMS each year. Peggy Brackbill '49 Shenk, his wife of 72 years – whom he had noticed in Mrs. Kemrer's Latin class and had asked to walk with him during the annual Massanutten Peak climb of 1946 – also provided a significant attraction.

Shenk attended EMS for three years, gaining experiences that would last him a lifetime. He worked in the newly-built chapel, Lehman Auditorium, for 45 cents an hour, and he and his friends cleaned chicken houses.

But it was his spiritual development at the school that Shenk cites as particularly meaningful. He became involved with EMC's Young People's Christian Association, and he felt teachers nudged him in the right direction. "It was just a part of the teaching," he says. "There was much encouragement to be a witness...to be involved in the work of the church...to live a good life."

PASTORING AND EDUCATING

After getting married in February of 1952, the Shenks moved to Sarasota, Florida. Shenk oversaw the building and pastoring of Newtown Chapel, a Mennonite church

in the heart of a Black neighborhood during a time of strict segregation. After a few years, Shenk returned to Tuttle Avenue, where he pastored until 1971.

When Shenk's wife received a work opportunity at EMC, Shenk returned to EMS – this time as a part-time Bible and social studies teacher. This work would pair nicely with his pastorates at Trissels Mennonite Church near Broadway, Virginia and Valley View Mennonite Church near Bergton, Virginia. Shenk also soon became the school counselor at EMS.

Shenk enjoyed his decades of work at EMS, though he admits being a counselor can be a complex job. He fondly remembers how he became something of a school pastor through his role, planning chapels and having helpful and healthy conversations with students.

EDUCATION AND LEGACY

During Shenk's time in Florida, he earned his bachelor's degree from EMC through a junior college and correspondence courses. He later took courses at the University of Virginia and earned a master's degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

This love of education spilled into Shenk's work: he helped establish a Christian day school in Sarasota, worked with high schoolers at EMS, and pastored nearly his entire adult life.

With three children who attended EMS and two of them pastoring their own congregations, Shenk leaves a legacy of education and encouragement. He continues to use his careful noticing and remembering to share the lessons he's learned throughout a full life.



James Souder '09

Step 1: Buy a bike. Step 2: Join a choir. Step 3: Get to work. Thanks to already-ample experience in engaging with new contexts, James Souder '09 knew the best way to find home in Amsterdam six years ago was to jump right in.

For Souder, who has three older sisters who also attended EMS, jumping right in was nothing new. In high school, he was involved in “a bit of everything,” from orchestra and jazz band to Touring Choir and Chamber Choir, from student council to cross country and track. He recalls days when, between morning Mandarin classes and evening musical rehearsals, he spent close to sixteen hours at the school.

In his move up the hill to Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Souder majored in Environmental and Social Sustainability. He explored how to think about meeting people’s needs without exceeding environmental limits – a “wicked problem” with complicated answers.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE – BETWEEN SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL

After spending a year in Pittsburgh, Souder moved to Washington, D.C. to coordinate their chapter of the Food Recovery Network. He then traveled to Burkina Faso with Mennonite Central Committee, using his creative photography skills to document practices of farmers dealing with a changing climate.

Now deep in the social side of environmental issues, Souder

began to feel that without technical knowledge and systems-thinking, some of the solutions he had worked on were simply “bandaids.” This led him to Yale University to study industrial ecology and green design.

Souder’s newly-gained expertise in the ins and outs of material production got him excited about rethinking systems. In 2018, he was hired by Metabolic, a project-based environmental consulting company in Amsterdam that works to create sustainable systems by working with governments and manufacturers. Souder quickly became a senior consultant, responsible for encouraging circular systems, in which early stages of the production of material goods value “higher R strategies.” These strategies include regenerating resources used in products, rethinking product design, and repurposing parts of the product during its use.

FINDING BALANCE

But while Souder felt his consulting work was important, he also began to recognize that he was caught up in a “go, go, go, mentality...again.” This led him to reconsider something that had before felt so natural: What does it mean to “jump right in”?

Souder says that, like the system of material production, we as humans only have a certain amount of energy. He adds, “We need to be in tune with what gives us energy, what takes our energy, and how we can best use our

gifts and skills to contribute in a positive way to society.”

BACK TO THE “WHY”

Now, it is Souder’s goal to maintain this new-found balance between, on one hand, the excitement of passions and wanting to be involved, and on the other, taking care of himself. He reflects, “I’ve been focusing on doing things for me, not what I think others want me to do, and really blossoming and growing in new directions.” This mindfulness mirrors that which he is calling for from industry: “How are we making choices?” he asks. “From a grounded place or a trying-to-keep-up-with-things place?”

Souder hopes to continue to ease himself back into the social side of his work as Communications Lead for the Industries Consulting division at Metabolic. He hopes to continue to find ways to “strengthen bonds between people at a local scale” while remembering a focus he appreciated about his education at EMS: “We are global citizens and part of something bigger.”

Speaking of circular systems, Souder says his love of music – nurtured and grown at EMS – has been one thing that has kept him going and lifted his spirits. He’s even had a chance to play his soprano saxophone, which was purchased his senior year of high school, with his choir. “It has sort of come full-circle,” he says with a smile.

Photo (below) & portrait courtesy of James Souder



2009 Student Council Organization, James is pictured on the right



James presents his work during Dutch Design Week.



Ashley Sauder '99 Miller

Ashley Sauder '99 Miller has carved out at her Harrisonburg home a little black studio. There, professional and home life – much like the elements of her mixed media art – exist side-by-side, intertwined, or merged into one.

It's not just a space, then, that Miller – an independent professional artist and the primary caregiver for her four children – has carved out. It's also a way of being. Miller recalls having short windows of time when her children were young to find her practice. This meant using materials that were readily available, cutting and weaving them together until it felt like they fit. Piecing together bits of material, as well as small, seemingly insignificant moments – as an artist and as a parent – eventually led Miller to see the bigger picture: all those tiny parts put together can create something novel and magnificent.

This skill of seeing something new in the superficially worthless, mundane, or forgotten now guides Miller's work and vision as an established artist.

BUILDING A CAREER

After earning her Master of Fine Arts from James Madison University (JMU) in 2007, Miller built her now-flourishing career piece-by-piece. One of those pieces stands out from the rest: an old cane rocking chair that belonged to Miller's grandmother. When the caning got damaged, Miller leapt into action, teaching herself

to cane. Miller says, "We want to think we don't care about stuff, but when you're holding onto something that reminds you of somebody, it becomes really important." This restoration project took on a life of its own, with bits of weaving joining her canvases, then leading to over a thousand chair paintings that represent people, remembering, or connection. Miller's collection of chair pieces earned her an endearing nickname at festivals: The Chair Lady.

But Miller and her art have stretched beyond the simple label of The Chair Lady. Her mixed media work, which often includes bits of fabric, quilts, or other found materials, now features floral images, while maintaining the layering and abstractness of her style. Miller has been named a finalist for the William and Dorothy Yeck Purchase Award in the Young Painters Competition at Miami University in 2016, Best in Show at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art Boardwalk Art Show in 2016 and 2023, and selected for a solo show at VaMOCA's Runnymede Gallery in 2017. Her work has been published in the magazine Studio Visit, the periodical New American Paintings, and the book Wild Lands by Jen Tough Gallery. Her work has homes in many art collections, both private and corporate, including the Capital One Art Bank private collection.



Photos courtesy of Ashley Sauder Miller

INFLUENCES

Miller's successful career, however, has come long after her passion for art itself. Since the age of four, Miller has known she wanted to be an artist – and not just as a hobby. Early on, her parents provided her with the tools, and her uncle Allen Berkshire '70 taught watercolor classes from his home studio.

Thanks to her mother, Denise Berkshire '74 Sauder's, and other family members' strong connections to Eastern Mennonite School (EMS), Miller attended beginning in 7th grade. Barbara Gautcher, EMS art teacher for 32 years, became a special connection. Miller remembers Gautcher – whom she still considers a friend – as a welcoming, open person whose encouragement and steady presence has helped shape Miller's career, parenting, and even spirituality.

Miller credits Gautcher, and Hesston College and JMU instructors, as mentors who encouraged her to see art as a career path.

FINDING THE WORK

On the life of an artist, Miller says, "You have to find your work. You have to seek it out." In both her personal and professional life, Miller is committed to doing the hard work of seeking and making new. She has made a life of noticing the little meaningful pieces, and meshing them together – little by little, with care and repetition – until she's found it.

FLAMES FUND – *What inspires you?*

Select one of these areas of impact

#1 Support our overall vision & mission

Encourage our entire K-12 Learning Community!
Unrestricted gift for where needed most

#2 Students

expand access to holistic learning

- Tuition support & need-based aid
- Learning support services for all
- Create a culture of belonging

#3 Educators

encourage excellence

- Academics
- Experiential Learning
- Faculty enrichment

#4 Campus

enhance spaces to belong

- Facilities & outdoor environment
- Athletic fields & automotive fleet
- Stewardship of buildings & grounds

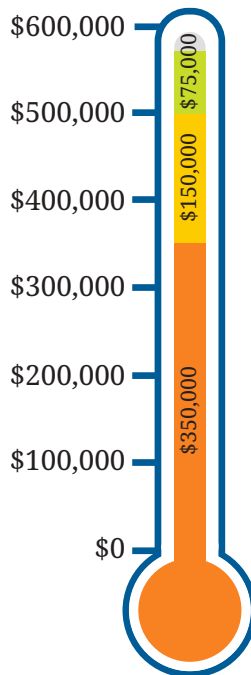
#5 Core Values

build a better world

- Faith community
- Restorative Justice practices
- Compassionate service

2024-25 Goal: \$575,000

- VDOE Tax Credit Gifts
- Christmas Fund Drive
- Other Contributions



VDOE Tax Credits

Contributions through the VDOE Scholarship program provide direct aid for students and strengthen the Flames Fund

2024-2025 GOVERNING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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easternmennonite.org/
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Today is written by Trisha Blosser, director of advancement, and designed by Lindsey Kolb. Editorial support from Paul Leaman, head of school. Photos by EMS staff unless otherwise noted.

Send feedback to today@easternmennonite.org

Find past issues at easternmennonite.org/today

In admissions processes, Eastern Mennonite School does not discriminate on the basis of any race, color, handicap, national or ethnic origin, or religion, and admits students to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school.

The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the school's non-discrimination policies, including its Title IX policy: Debbie Katz, high school counselor, 540-236-6022. For assistance related to Title IX or other civil rights laws, please contact OCR at OCR@ed.gov or 800-421-3481, TDD 800-877-8339.

Gathering Space - "Dried in!"

The vision we've had for the Gathering Space is coming to fruition and is palpable when standing inside. It feels open, full of fresh air, and is naturally lit. We are excited about the many uses this space will provide our community!



Learn more: easternmennonite.org/support



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VISION:

Eastern Mennonite School aspires to embody the love of Jesus as a learning community where every student belongs, thrives, and joins God's work in the world.

MISSION:

Eastern Mennonite School, with home and church, invites students to faith in Jesus Christ, academic excellence, personal integrity, and compassionate service.

FOLLOW US:



JOIN US FOR HOMECOMING!

OCTOBER 18-19, 2024

Friday: chapel, picnic, and homecoming concert

Saturday: breakfast (stories), volleyball, soccer, and building tours

All weekend: reunions for classes ending in 4 and 9

Register at the link below to help us prepare!

easternmennonite.org/homecoming