

A
WESTGATE

Retrospective

2026

SEEDS OF MUSIC

“Westgate was just a great place to make music.”

MASON DUECK, PAGE 18



a Westgate Retrospective 2026

WESTGATE MENNONITE
COLLEGIATE

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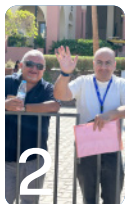


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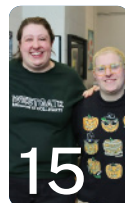
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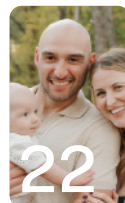
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Finding connection through People and Communities

BY James Friesen



Westgate students make their own pyramid at Giza, Egypt.

It was going to be another typical Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Middle East trip, something the school has done eleven times in the past. Students were excited about connecting with people and embracing the ancient history of Jordan and Israel/Palestine. Indeed, as we walked through Amman on the first day, with our newly pur-

chased kafiyes, pausing to listen to the call to prayer, everything seemed as usual.

A few days later, everything changed.

We were sitting outside the ruins of Petra in Wadi Musa, sharing our highlights of the trip thus far, when suddenly the sky lit up. It was the beginning of the attacks between

Iran and Israel.

Although we would never have wanted to be in the midst of this conflict, the tensions gave us new insights into the culture and more meaningful relationships with the people we met. We were able to connect with people on a deeper level as conversations about the way political forces shape this region



Wael and Raed wishing us the best as we head to Egypt.

were more than simply words — we could see the effects firsthand.

We were also embraced by people in Jordan, who took care of us and made sure we felt safe. I smile as I think back to Mohammed, the manager at one of our hotels, who spoke to us after we witnessed explosions in the sky. He told us he had seen this many times in the past and that we were fully safe, calming us with his warm and gentle demeanour.

However, despite assurances that these attacks would certainly end soon, the situation continued to deteriorate. How our group of 34 people was going to get home became an ever-growing problem when our flight out of Amman was cancelled. This was, after all, a group of grade twelve students, all of them excited about their upcoming graduation.

But, in navigating this problem, we saw how truly cared for we were. In Jordan, our travel agent, Wael, whose family has guided all our past Westgate groups, coordinated everything necessary for us to boat from Aqaba to Taba, Egypt, then bus across the Sinai to Cairo. Wael and Raed, our guide, came with us as far as they could, waving as we

left on the boat. It felt like we were in a movie, setting off on a grand adventure of exploration, saying goodbye to loved ones.

Back in Canada, Mike, a travel agent who has organized countless Westgate flights, frantically booked us on two flights from Cairo to Frankfurt so that we could “catch up” to our planned flights. Right after he managed to get that last seat booked, his text to me read: “Now I can breathe.” It meant we could breathe as well.

How did the students respond to all of these changes — standing in a

of two Indiana Jones movies?” So, yes, all was just fine for these young adventurers.

Of course, our experience was so much more than those fun responses. This group of students has been changed. They have had a glimpse of the fear we do not see on the news when people speak about surgical strikes and successful military operations. One student said they will now always picture a person at the end of the arc of a missile in the sky. All of them will surely recall some of the people we met, people who are caught in polit-



The whole Westgate group gathered together at Petra.

"We were able to connect with people on a deeper level as conversations about the way political forces shape this region were more than simply words."

long line at the Egyptian border as the visa fee kept increasing, taking a long bus ride through the desert, having the bus almost break down as we went under the Suez Canal? Well, in the words of one student: “Does this mean we get to see the pyramids?” Another: “Does this mean we now will be in the locales

ical games of power and revenge. I know we will all fervently pray that our leaders will stop seeing the world as a map of objectives and targets and instead will remember this is a world full of people and communities.

More than just Giving Back

BY Adam Klassen Bartel

When asked why she volunteers, Amy (Kasdorf '03) Reimer turned the question around. "Why not volunteer?"

Amy's first experience of volunteering came from her grade nine Christian Studies volunteering requirement at Westgate. And, except for when her own children were young, she has been volunteering ever since. "Throughout the years, I've been fortunate to volunteer in a wide range of roles-serving tea and snacks to people receiving chemotherapy, volunteering as a board member, building homes, accompanying folks with disabilities to the casino for a fun night out, facilitating grief support groups-to name a few." Currently, Amy volunteers at Women's Health Clinic with the Dragonfly Support Program, providing peer support to people experiencing pregnancy and infant loss.

While academics are vital to Westgate, the school also believes that education should not only happen in the classroom. As part of our stated goal of 'Serving the Wider Community', our strategic plan states that Westgate will "foster opportunities for students and teachers to give back to the local community." One form of this is through volunteering.

Every Grade nine student is still expected to complete a volunteering requirement in their Christian Studies course. The type of volunteering is fairly open and students



Amy Reimer continues to volunteer in the community.

find many opportunities.

Lucy Armstrong, a current grade nine student, chose to visit two women from her church currently at Misericordia Hospital, whom she affectionately called "The Ladies."

One of these ladies didn't speak much, so Lucy would read to her. The other spoke a great deal, so Lucy listened. "I really like hearing stories," Lucy said, "and I thought, if they don't tell them to people, where are those stories going to go?"

Amy Reimer remembers her own first experience with volunteering. "When I first started volunteering with Westgate in grade 9, my eyes were opened to seeing how many places really needed and wanted volunteers- even inexperienced, grade 9 kids with no remarkable skills like ourselves. It made me realize how much of a need there is for people to just show up and help in whatever small way that they can."



Adina Wall and her grandchildren.

At times volunteering can seem like a one-sided relationship. Someone with time, energy, or expertise willing to fill a need without the expectation of compensation. However, when talking with the people doing the volunteering, they tell a different story. Adina Wall, Grandmother of current Westgate student Avery Phaneuf, long-time member of North Kildonan Mennonite Church, and Volunteer at Bethania Personal Care Home talks about what she gets from volunteering, "Volunteering helps me grow as a person by exposing me to new perspectives and challenges. Working alongside diverse groups of people, I learn valuable skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. These experiences broaden my understanding of the world and help me develop empathy and compassion."

Another volunteer opportunity that all Westgate students participate in is the annual Community

So... Why Westgate?

Compiled by [Natalie Johnson](#)

Service Day, something that has existed at Westgate in a variety of forms for at least forty years. It's a day set aside where all students, and most of the staff, volunteer for a variety of organizations in and around Winnipeg. Students paint walls, clean up trash, help in their old schools, and plant gardens, among many other things.

One of those organizations is Healthy Start, which offers pregnancy and parenting support. Executive Director Davorka Monti greatly appreciates the help Westgate students provide in packing food boxes, but also sees the benefits those students get from volunteering. They have the opportunity to interact with people who have had very different life experiences from their own and hopefully learn something about the world beyond Westgate.

Adina also sees volunteering as participating in something bigger than herself. "Ultimately," she says, "volunteering is about more than just giving back; it's about investing in a better future for everyone."

Lucy says something similar. "I imagine when I'm in a care home I'd like people to tell my stories to." Lucy is working to create the world she wants to live in.

We asked parents to reflect on their experience and their children's experience at Westgate, focusing on three themes.

1. CHOOSING WESTGATE

What motivated you to choose Westgate for your child?

Katie & Matt Wilms: We had visited a number of schools, but this was different. We could feel it the very first time we stepped foot in the doors for the Open House. We knew heading to the event that we were looking for something different in a school, but couldn't quite describe it. After leaving the open house that Sunday afternoon, we were in love.

This was what we had been searching for! What struck us immediately was the incredible community and the way in which everyone at the school makes you feel cared for and welcome. We felt absolute confidence that if we were accepted, our son would thrive at Westgate. Our experience so far has been even better than we had hoped. Our child is loving every minute of his experience and as parents we are so encouraged by all that he is learning and experiencing.

Kristen Black & Sean MacRae: We were drawn to Westgate because of its small class sizes



Matt & Katie Wilms and family.

and strong sense of community, and from our first interactions, the school truly felt like home. We felt confident that our child would be welcomed, known, and supported, and that she would have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships not only with her peers, but also with students in different grades and with staff and other members of the community.

We also appreciated Westgate's emphasis on music and the arts, as well as the many opportunities for learning beyond the traditional classroom. The school's commitment to outdoor education and community-based experiences allows students to explore the world around them, build confidence, and develop interests that can foster personal growth and a lifelong love of learning. On top of all this, the school itself is a wonderful environment: bright, clean, and inviting, with a beautiful location along the river that makes the campus feel open, welcoming, and inspiring.

Kerry & Jennifer Saner-Harvey: Both of us, as parents, had positive experiences at the Mennonite high schools we attended and hoped Westgate would be a setting where our Anabaptist Christian convictions would be present in the classroom and school community, and our kids would nurture friendships with peers that felt safe and respectful. We also anticipated they would have really great opportunities for nurturing their musical, theatre, and athletic abilities, including an excellent choir, band, and string ensemble. We also wanted them to have a strong French program



Kristen Black & Sean MacRae and family.

to continue their earlier French immersion, as well as having challenging academic opportunities in preparing them for University. We have been pleased in these areas overall.

2. FAITH AND WORLDVIEW

How has your experience at Westgate impacted your faith journey or worldview, if applicable?

Katie & Matt Wilms: Westgate has reminded our whole family of the remarkable impact faith and community can have on your everyday life. Westgate cares, whatever a child or family is going through they walk alongside you, pray for you, and support you. In very real ways, as parents we have seen and heard about how values of service to others, humility, and kindness are being modelled, encouraged, and celebrated.

Teachers and staff are kind, creative, and very engaging. They are committed to supporting our child's growth in not just the academic realm; they support them

in growing their character, their faith, and their ability to navigate a complex and ever-changing world.

Kristen Black & Sean MacRae:

While we do not identify as a faith-based family, we have appreciated the emphasis Westgate places on shared values such as kindness, generosity, respect, and community. These principles are important to our family, and it has been meaningful to see them actively modeled and reinforced in the school environment. Being part of a community that encourages empathy, service, and care for others has had a positive influence on our child's developing worldview.

Kerry & Jennifer Saner-Harvey:

It has been powerful to see the ways that Westgate has impacted the faith journey of our kids. They come home sharing what they learned in Christian Studies or chapel and asking deeper questions about the Bible, about peace and nonviolence, and what it means for us (as a family and community) to live our faith convictions in a complicated world. They also come home singing faith-



Kerry & Jennifer Saner-Harvey and family.

based songs that have impacted them (and are just plain catchy)! Developing relationships at school with peers that share their similar faith values has also been invaluable, and these relationships carry over into camp and denominational youth gatherings as well.

3. SUPPORT AND INCLUSION

In what ways has Westgate fostered a supportive and inclusive environment for students and families?

Katie & Matt Wilms: Every interaction and experience we have had with Westgate has been truly supportive and inclusive. Westgate is void of ego, judgement, and bias. The Westgate community nurtures and protects a very real and beautiful sense of belonging for all. It does that by celebrating differences and valuing all perspectives. On a regular basis, our child comes home and shares stories of support and care that he has experienced himself or has seen displayed to others.

Some examples that come to mind include: the incredible student support team that any student can reach out to. In tough moments, there is always someone to sit down and talk to, work through a difficult assignment with, or simply be with to play a game or reset. Additionally, the school offers a wide and varied selection of academic courses, athletic, music, and arts programs. Westgate recognizes that everyone has different interests and talents. At Westgate, the whole community is there to support all of you, as you bring your whole self to school.

We could not wish for anything more for our child and our entire family! Westgate has been an incredible blessing in our lives and we will forever be proud members of this community.

Kristen Black & Sean MacRae: Our daughter has felt genuinely welcomed and supported within the Westgate community. We have also been very impressed by the school's commitment to supporting students with diverse learning needs, not only through the compassion and acceptance shown by peers, but through

the meaningful resources and accommodations made available to our child.

Westgate has fostered a supportive and inclusive environment by intentionally welcoming families into the life of the school. Events such as the new parent information evening, Opening Program, Homecoming, and other gatherings have helped us feel connected and included. The staff have also been incredibly supportive of our child's pursuits outside of school.

Kerry & Jennifer Saner-Harvey:

We have been impressed with how intentional it appears the school has been to nurture an inclusive environment for other faith, racial, and gender identities. Our daughter arrived at grade 9 and there was real intentionality in integrating the new students with the existing classes. The teachers, principal, and other staff have shown personal interest in our kids, noticing their strengths and providing positive mentoring and opportunities for growth. They have felt supported, encouraged and welcomed!

On the Occasion of Loren Brown's Retirement

Memories of a Student, Colleague and Friend

BY Bob Hummelt

My standard approach to illustrate the rigours of the fur trade in my Canadian History class was to contrast my long, lean frame against what a typical *Coureurs de bois* needed to look like. I explained that my long legs would have taken up too much room, and my limited muscle mass would make me unable to haul 180 pounds of freight over a portage. Nor would I be able to paddle at a sustained 60 strokes per minute. To boot, the rain, sleet and sun would do serious damage to my alabaster skin, I would opine. No, the voyageur would ideally be shorter, compact but strong, tough, and commonly swarthy in complexion. One year as I was well into this *shtick*, a kid from the back chimed in, "Like Mr. Brown?" Authentic learning sparked at that moment, the concept no longer an abstract. The entire class could look past the 80s fashion sense that our newest teacher had chosen to bedeck himself in which could easily be replaced in their minds with deer-skins, powder blue capote and a *ceinture fléchée*. Loren became a multiple test question on the unit test, asking which attri-

butes Mr. Brown best shared with these *hommes du nord*...the answer was always E: All of the above.

Loren joined the Westgate staff in



Loren enjoys Marsh and Mountain camping with Heidi Koop ('04) and Johanna Klassen ('18).

Fall 1987 and never left. Much of his early career involved inspiring junior high science students. Each year, Grade Nines and their parents looked forward to their turn at constellational exploration, its gateway a mere telescope view away at a dark Glenlea sky. However, it can be argued that Mr. Brown's greatest impact on the school lay within the development of our French program. His ability to even be able to teach French is in itself remarkable, growing up in an area where

little or no French was taught. His adventurous spirit led him to take a beginner university class in the language, and the tenacity for which he is best known took over; subsequent language classes and summer immersion experiences earned him effective proficiency to teach. Eventually as senior staff, Loren's colleague, and former student, Nancy Loewen ('88), points to his leadership, where he made sure she and new members of the French department felt welcomed and encouraged. In a school well known for German instruction, Loren felt that there was room for similar excellence in French.

He implemented the opportunity for Grade 12 students to complete the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* (DELFP) exam. With this initiative, Westgate is the only non-immersion school in Winnipeg that offers this opportunity, where Westgate students have attained B2 status, awarded to language users who are able to communicate independently at a high level in most situations.

Napoleon Dynamite famously lamented to his friend Pedro that he



Loren Brown, Nancy Loewen ('88), Krista Neustaedter Barg ('87), and Gabrielle Bishop Wiebe ('08) on the heights of Mont Blanc leading another EST tour along with parent chaperones.

didn't have any "skills". While I'm not sure how Loren would do with a set of nunchucks, he certainly brought a wide variety of abilities to Westgate's educational landscape. First as a teaching colleague and later as an administrator, I witnessed Loren's Macgyver-esque guile in action. He is embedded in Marsh and Mountain Club lore for crafting kettle tripods, windbreaks, canoe catamarans, cooking shelters and wilderness furnishings with a bit of wire, rope, tape, and his long serving orange tarp. After a trip, it was not unusual to be given an item or garment he felt you needed for a better experience next time. My personal favorite was the blue fleece pants, complete with drawstring that he sewed for me. No apparel could suit your needs better when you are sealed in a quinzee on a -32 degree night. Loren's ingenuity was usually complimented by his flexibility. Flagging morale on an arduous canoe trip was boosted by quickly planned "on and off-

shore" games. This ability to work with what he had available could be also moved indoors. Our year away from 86 West Gate during campus redevelopment found us teaching in the limited spaces of a surplus elementary school and two nearby churches. I showed Loren where he was slated to conduct his junior high shops class, a broom closet so tight that you didn't have enough room to change your mind, let alone teach a class. Undaunted, projects followed without power tools, ranging from rockets to seasonal ornaments made from recyclables.

For Loren, time beyond the classroom was, in his own words, simply "doing things for and with students." I believe that when a teacher believes this, a career is well spent. In Loren's extracurricular world, I was often close enough to enjoy his genuine interactions with kids. Cajoling, gentle ribbing, positive feedback, and one on one skill building time were all in play as he coached volleyball, basket-

ball, soccer, and most recently provincial championship ice fishing. Loren led more than twenty European Study Tours, all without using expensive package tour companies. Instead, his planning and supervision with other staff offered kids a more vibrant language experience as they forayed beyond the typical tourist trails. Loren's set building skills with a few student helpers in tow "made the scene" for all the annual junior plays, senior dramas and senior musicals. And with all this, somehow there was still time for Mr. Brown to drive kids around in the yellow bus.

It was during a routine medical exam required to retain the bus license that Loren's cancer was detected. His illness put his colleagues and students on their heels, yet for Loren and his wife Kathie, it became a defining time in their faith. Loren shared that prayer and an overwhelming sense that he needed to leave it all in God's hands, come what may, brought him to healing. In some measure this is perhaps why Loren commonly lets those around him know that "Jesus loves you." I've heard it when he dismissed classes for the day and when he finished shoveling kids' quinzee openings shut for the night. I've read it in his students' report card comments. I heard it when I finished my last day as principal at Westgate. Ultimately, if Mr. Brown says it, it must be true.

So, if the question is asked what attributes does Mr. Brown have that are valuable and meaningful to an independent faith school, the answer would be E: All of the above.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

MISSION STATEMENT

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate is a Christian school grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the mission of the school to provide a well-rounded education, which will inspire and empower students to live as people of God.

VISION

As a Christian educational community within the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate integrates academic learning with growth in character and faith, together with peacemaking and service to God and all creation.

Westgate seeks to provide a quality academic education in the context of a faith community, upheld by our Christian values. We are convinced that learning, at its best, occurs when academics are bound together with faith and positive relationships.

We will strive to regularly commit this vision and these goals to God in prayer, and we recognize the importance of the continued support of families and our supporting churches in this endeavor.



FUTURE PRIORITIES - STRATEGIC PLAN

The current strategic planning process began with a reflection on how the community assesses Westgate's success in fulfilling its mission and vision. A survey was distributed to gather input from the broader Westgate community. Insight from the survey informed discussions that led to an update of core principles and the creation of a strategic agenda outlining priorities for the next five years.

FAITH AND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

A strong understanding of identity creates resilience in an organization. Our anabaptist faith and perspective guides our core commitments and our actions. It is essential to bring the wider community (parents, churches, and others) into its shared vision. Equally important is recognizing where we come from and the place we occupy in the broader context.

Our strategic goals are to:

- Deepen our awareness of who we are as an Anabaptist school community
- Support our staff and students in building meaningful relationships with our wider community
- Understand our responsibilities and identity as treaty people

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES

Good education never allows itself to remain stagnant; it is an art form that must be continuously revisited and renewed. Westgate is committed to critically assessing and refining its educational practices to serve a diverse range of students effectively.

Our strategic goals are to:

- To use inclusive educational pedagogy
- To have clear structures that support all students in their academic growth
- To guide students better in course selection

BUILDING WIDER PROGRAM PRIORITIES

A strong understanding of identity creates resilience in an organization. Our anabaptist faith and perspective guides our core commitments and our actions. It is essential to bring the wider community (parents, churches, and others) into its shared vision. Equally important is recognizing where we come from and the place we occupy in the broader context.

Our strategic goals are to:

- Strengthen the capacity and quality of life skills education
- Build support and longevity into our unique Westgate “heritage” programs
- Develop financial structures that make these wider programs accessible to all students

“Westgate afforded me [the opportunity] to learn about other communities, gain a deeper respect for different cultures, and in turn learn about myself, my faith, my background, and my community.”

— Survey Response

“Attending Westgate was an incredibly important time for me. Especially all of the study tours which forced me to challenge my own views and beliefs.”

— Survey Response

Wish for the future:

“That Westgate continue to work towards an inclusive space for all where staff and students are reflective of the diversity of the larger community. That students continue to be taught to develop critical thinking skills necessary to adopt well-informed opinions on world issues (local and global).”

— Survey Response



Read the full strategic plan at westgatemennonite.ca/plan25



INTERTERM WEEK AT WESTGATE



Caleb Foth, Samuel Wiens, and Ives Reimer lean in to learning creative arts.



Susanne du Plooy demonstrates loom weaving to Reese Kendel.



Lyndon Baerg shows students the art of pysanka.



Emma Wiehler and Naia Tar cook with fresh vegetables.



Natalie Beaudry, Austin Neufeld Bridges, and Eleanor Nussbaum make healthy wraps.



Maria Farkas Freitas works intently on her art.



Abe Harder, Otis Wiebe, and Ozzie Taronno working hard on their stop motion film.



Students experimented with wood burning projects to create art.



Connor Lynch practices his new skills on the sewing machine with support from Susanne du Plooy.

Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit

Living out our Faith Together

BY [Doug Durksen \('94\)](#)

Last spring, four Westgate Mennonite Collegiate students had the opportunity to attend the Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit in Wurttemberg, Germany. For three of the students, the opportunity arose because they were living in Hamburg as part of a German student exchange program, while another was travelling in Europe with family and joined the gathering along the way.

Looking back, the exact details of small-group discussions may have faded, but the energy of engaging with the wider church community has remained vivid. With groups from different continents leading worship services, Marcus Huebner reflected on how fascinating it was to see the diversity of worship styles across cultures. Similarly, Annika Durksen noted the joy of learning new songs from around the world while also singing familiar tunes in unfamiliar languages.

For Sara Hiebert, the Youth Summit offered a meaningful reminder of the role faith and community play in her life. “I hadn’t had the opportunity to go to church for a couple of months while on

exchange, and being able to participate in the Youth Summit reminded me of how much I had missed worshipping in community,” she shared.

All four students emphasized how valuable it was to see what the global church looks like in practice. Whether through worship or small-group exchanges, they returned



Marcus Huebner, Annika Durksen, Elia Koslowsky-Wiebe, and Sara Hiebert attend Mennonite World Conference.

with a deeper understanding of the breadth of Mennonite identity. “So much of what I think about being a Mennonite comes from the Manitoba Russian-Mennonite experience. But it was interesting to hear about others’ life experiences and different perspectives,” Sara added. For Elia Koslowsky-Wiebe, a prayer activity near the end of the summit

helped her see how she was part of the larger church: “At the end of the conference, we had a moment to pray for any part of the world by writing down our prayers on a sticky note and placing it on a giant map. That really connected to my faith experience as a large part of my faith is being God’s hands, and it was really impactful to see so many people from around the globe praying for each other and caring for each other.”

Returning to Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and studying Mennonite history in their grade 12 courses, these students carry more than just memories of a unique trip. Their time at the Youth Summit reminded them that being Mennonite is not defined by one tradition or one culture, but by a worldwide community of people seeking to live out their faith together. The songs they sang, the conversations they shared, and the friendships they formed are reminders that their story is part of something much bigger — a global family of faith that continues to grow and inspire.

Supporting Students at Every Step

BY Lydia Epp



Part of the student support team at Westgate. Pam Derksen, Thalia Neufeld, Nate Hastings-Fuhr, and Sam Haight ('15).

After attending large schools as a student, Westgate was a culture shock in many ways. I originally started my time at Westgate as an Educational Assistant in January 2021, fresh out of the latest lockdown. This was by no means a typical time for any school, but where I anticipated a sense of exhaustion and exasperation, I saw joy in every corner of the school. Truly, despite the uncertainty of the time, both students and staff were glad to be together in this space. That is what makes Westgate special; we are a community that works collaboratively to ensure students' success. It was this environment where students experience progress and joy in learning that made me want to be a teacher. I wanted to help make learning accessible, per-

sonal, and joyful for everyone. And now I am back where I see the difference that the Student Services team makes at Westgate everyday.

As a space, Student Services is where students can find support in a quiet and comfortable setting. Students are welcome to come in at any time on their own, by referral, or during scheduled support periods or peer tutoring sessions. This is where students are greeted by the friendly faces of Pam Derksen, Nate Hastings-Fuhr, Thalia Neufeld, Olha Lytvynenko, and Sam Haight ('15)-the EAs. These are the people that make Westgate work. They are strong advocates for students and know just how to push students to challenge themselves, celebrate wins, and overcome obstacles. Olha says, "I love seeing students

grow, thrive, and reach their potential. Being able to support them, watch that moment when something finally clicks, or see them gain confidence after struggling with a concept is incredibly rewarding. I also love listening to students and learning from them, they inspire me just as much as I hope to inspire them."

The work of the EAs is coordinated by the Learning Support Teachers. Sherisse Spent and I are both classroom teachers in addition to our role as LSTs and Tessa Nussbaum is a double-edged sword (or ploughshare?) of support as a LST and Counsellor. We all work with students, teachers, and parents to ensure that students are getting the support that they need in and out of classes by finding resources and

modes of learning. Together, this partnership strengthens student support as we can monitor progress and challenges.

This collaborative approach naturally extends beyond classroom learning and into students' social, emotional, and future-focused needs. Both Tessa and Crys Thiessen are the Counsellors that students turn to for one-on-one guidance. They help students through social and emotional challenges, academic anxiety, and everything in between.

At the core of Westgate is community, collaboration, and joy, and this is obvious in Student Services. Supporting students at Westgate means recognizing that learning cannot be separated from social, emotional, and personal well-being, and we accomplish this through very intentional structures and planning. Student Services is a network where EAs, LSTs, and Counsellors meet the needs of the student holistically. Being a part of this team first as an EA and now as a teacher and LST has allowed me to watch students gain confidence, skills, and belonging. Pam says it better when she says, "I like the way that relationships are at the centre of everything we do. We have a unique opportunity to get to know students really well and to be able to see their successes as the year progresses." Indeed, it has reaffirmed why, when I became a teacher, I wanted to return to Westgate; it is a privilege to work in a school where staff come together every day with joy and love for our students and where everyone is given what they need to thrive.

Winter Hike

Thoughts from a (mostly) frozen lake

BY Pat Koslowsky-Wiebe



Students are nearing the end of the portage to Three Lake on the way out of the Mantario Cabin.

One of my favourite things I get to do at Westgate is the winter hike. One particularly memorable hike was to the Mantario Cabin in March of 2022. When we got word that there was an opening, we hoped that ice conditions would still be good.

On short notice we had ten enthusiastic grade 12 students sign up to hike 20 kilometres across frozen lakes. On the day of the hike it was good weather, a bit on the warm side, but we were all excited to get out there. We got onto Big Whiteshell Lake and decided that it looked okay, so we gave word for the bus to leave. Shortly after its departure, we crossed a very slushy section of snow with some runoff water collecting but shrugged it off as an anomaly. When we got to the next lake, it

was mostly bare ice, but it looked kind of soft. We knew that the lake ice was still well over a foot thick, and safe for us to walk on, but a layer of meltwater had collected on top, and a thinner layer of ice sat on top of that. As we started walking, we found that some spots the ice was thick enough to hold us, other spots, it was...well, not thick enough. Around 50 metres onto the lake our trekking party devolved into a mad scramble just to find solid ground to stand on. With each attempt to step onto solid ice, it would break just as we put our weight on it.

After overcoming the initial anxiety of the effort the hike was going to take us, we discovered that the trails where skiers or snowmobiles had gone before us had a slightly better chance of keeping us dry

and out of the upper wet slush on the top of the ice. We fell into a pattern. The leader would look for ice solid enough to hold, and everyone would follow that same path, single file. When we found a stretch of lake that was particularly solid, we would find ourselves spreading out, but as soon as we started to break through that top layer, into the meltwater, sure enough, back to single file. Back to following the one safe route.

On the way out to the cabin on the first night we were taxed almost to our limit. There were tears, wet feet and hands, tired people, and joy and exhilaration...and then a few more tears. The group of kids we had were tough, determined, and strong. After a rest day of sauna and polar bear dunks in the lake, we were ready to head back onto the frozen lakes, back towards Big Whiteshell. We knew what to expect, we knew how to get through, and we were confident we could do it.

The first lakes went fairly well, with some expected breakthroughs, but with garbage bags in our boots, we had mostly dry feet. Fast forward to the last lake, Big Whiteshell. On day one, this had been the most solid lake, still with a lot of snow cover. Now, the beautiful weather had added meltwater to that layer of snow and the entire lake was covered in slush. Now, if you have ever tried snowshoeing in a Slurpee, that's what we were doing. With each step, the snowshoes would sink through the snow and slush and, when you tried to pick them up, they weighed more than our legs wanted to deal with. Eventually, we found that if we slid our feet through the slush we didn't



Mason Penner ('22) and Matthaeus Dyck ('22) seek solid ice in Ritchey Lake.

have to pick up all that weight, but it was still exhausting. Our pace slowed to a crawl, each foot sliding forward taking a huge effort.

Out at the front of the group we tried to imagine how we could make it all the way across the lake. Feet were now getting wet and starting to get cold and we still had a long way to go. As we trudged, no...slogged and slogged slowly along, we suddenly heard a yell from the back of the group. Our first thought was that something was very wrong and we needed to go back to help. We turned and saw a student running from the back. Was someone hurt? Did a snowshoe or sled break? More importantly -how was he moving so fast? Soon we could hear him yelling, "Take your snowshoes off!" He had taken a leap of logic that our exhausted brains had missed. We

followed this shouted advice and took off our snowshoes, and it was like we were on a different lake. In just our boots we splashed through the slush and immediately doubled our speed. The other side of the lake suddenly seemed in reach.

This is why I love these uniquely Westgate experiences like the winter hike. This is where students get a chance to see that they can push themselves beyond what they imagined and, in doing so, can imagine new paths, new ways forward that help themselves, and us, move in a new way.

WESTGATE PLANTED SEEDS OF MUSIC

BY Aaron Epp ('02)

From teaching to performing with orchestras to pursuing careers as singer-songwriters, Westgate alumni continue to share their musical gifts long after they've left Armstrong's Point.



Lhasa Petik performs with Inzo at the Electric Forest music festival in Rothbury, Michigan, during her birthday weekend in 2024.

**LHASA
PETIK**

“(Westgate) was a big part of shaping who I am and the path that I’ve taken.”

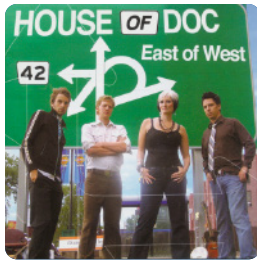
If Lhasa Petik ('17) isn't the only Westgate grad who's performed at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, she's got to be the only one who's played there twice. The singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, producer, and DJ first played the historic venue near Denver, Colorado, in 2022 while singing with Australian dance musician *Roman Silver*. Last year, she performed a solo set opening for *Inzo*, a Colorado-based electronic artist.

Petik was already making a living off of music by the time she first played at Red Rocks, thanks to the streaming royalties from a lo-fi album she released in 2021 under the name *Edelwize*.

Petik grew up singing and playing violin, endeavours she continued to pursue at Westgate. She also taught herself how to play guitar, standup bass, and bassoon during her time at the school, and started writing her own songs.

“(Westgate) was a big part of shaping who I am and the path that I've taken,” Petik says.

Up next for the musician is a tour throughout the United States as a member of *Inzo's* band — including another performance at Red Rocks.



Rebecca Harder with House of Doc on the album cover for *East of West* (2007).



Rebecca Harder and House of Doc performing at Quinzmas spectacular.

REBECCA HARDER

When asked about highlights from her time at Westgate, Rebecca (Wiebe) Harder ('96) mentions visiting supporting congregations on Sunday mornings for deputations — or, as they're called now, Westgate Worships.

“You could tell how appreciative (the church members) were, and they weren't there for a concert,” says Harder, who played flute in band and participated in every singing ensemble. “They were there for a worship experience, and that mattered to me.”

After graduating, Harder pursued music and education degrees at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the University of Manitoba before settling into a career as an elementary music teacher. She left that for a few years to record and tour throughout Canada and Europe with *House of Doc*, the folk band she formed with her husband and two brothers.

In 2022, Harder started substitute teaching at Westgate; she joined the school's staff in 2025.

Harder still makes time for music by leading worship at Charleswood Mennonite Church, singing back-up for Winnipeg musician *JP Hoe* at his annual Christmas concert, and singing in Westgate chapels.

“For me, it's always about the audience,” she says. “If (I) can make the audience feel something, then I feel something.”

“For me, it's always about the audience... if (I) can make the audience feel something, then I feel something.”

Jake Enns ('10) jokes that music was his only strong suit at Westgate. Enns played violin in the string orchestra and trumpet in the band program, and he sang in every choral and vocal jazz ensemble. In his free time, he played guitar with friends.

“It was pretty much hitch my wagon big time to the ol' music program there,” Enns says. “It just felt normal to me. It was stuff I was good at innately.”

Enns, a married father of two, is a music teacher at Collège Jeanne-Sauvé, a French-immersion high school in Winnipeg. In his free time, he gigs with three Winnipeg groups: He plays bass with the *Inheritors* and the *Dan Winters Band* and he plays trumpet in *Big Heist Brass Band*.

Oh, and he also plays music in church whenever his mother asks him to accompany her.

“A big lesson I learned from Westgate was how to remove yourself and serve the music instead,” he says. “Come prepared so that you can make other people in the ensemble sound good or come prepared so we can dive deeper into the music. It was such a service-minded way of doing music that I had not experienced before.”

JAKE ENNS



Jake Enns pauses for a selfie with a local musician during a trip to Cuba with his students.



Jake Enns performs with his students during a concert in Regina.

“A big lesson I learned from Westgate was how to remove yourself and serve the music instead.”

“Westgate was just a great place to make music,” says Mason Dueck (‘22). The son of a piano and voice teacher, Dueck had already learned a bit of piano and played the cello for six years by the time he got to Westgate. During his six years at the school, he participated in almost every music ensemble.

“Westgate has fantastic music teachers,” says Dueck, who studied under Andrea Bell, Ross Brownlee and Vic Pankratz (‘77). “I really credit them with shaping music in my life.”

Dueck is still playing cello as he pursues a degree in music at the University of Manitoba.

After graduating in June, he hopes to pursue a post-baccalaureate diploma in performance at the U of M. If all goes according to plan, graduate studies and a career as an orchestral musician will follow.

“It’s very therapeutic and magical to make music as an ensemble — everyone playing together and making something special that is magical for you but also magical for the audience to hear it.”

MASON DUECK



Mason Dueck is pursuing a degree in music at the University of Manitoba. Photos by Rein Cabalquinto.



“It’s very therapeutic and magical to make music as an ensemble...magical for you but also magical for the audience to hear it.”



Karen Barg performs with Canadian rock singer Lee Aaron. Photo by Leonard Crate.



KAREN BARG

Classically-trained violinist Karen Barg (‘89) doesn’t question her purpose in life. “I know this is what I was put on this earth to do,” Barg says of her musical pursuits, which include leading *Luminous String Quartet*, a group she formed in 2015. “God gave me this gift and I am now using it to the best of my abilities.”

Available for weddings, corporate events, birthdays and more, *Luminous String Quartet* has a sprawling repertoire. Clients who hire the group can choose just about any genre, from traditional classical to popular music ranging from *AC/DC* to *Taylor Swift*.

In 2020, *Luminous String Quartet* released *I Did It For Love: A Canadian Classic Rock Compilation*. The album features 11 songs arranged by Barg, including covers of *Neil Young*, *Bryan Adams*, and *Kim Mitchell*.

Barg has performed with an array of musicians that includes *Michael Bublé*, *Disturbed*, the *Eagles* and *Lee Aaron*, and she was nominated for a Juno Award as part of the group *Indian City*.

Barg has made her living as a musician throughout her entire working life, but she says her career really took off when she was 47.

“It doesn’t matter what age you are — things can happen at any time,” she says. “You just have to be patient. God’s got a plan and he knows when it’s time to ramp things up.”

“God gave me this gift and I am now using it to the best of my abilities.”

HIGH FIVE FOR '25

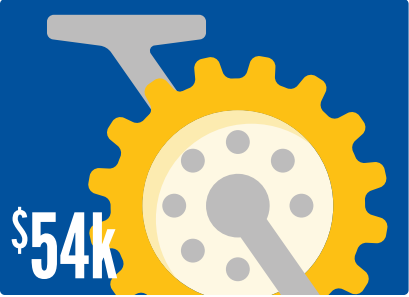
You helped us meet the needs of our students in 2025.



\$80k

BURSARY BANQUET

This year, we raised \$80,900.



\$54k

CYCLATHON

This year, we raised \$54,964.



\$19k

COMMUNITY SERVICE DAY


Donors at this event raised \$19,657.



\$15k

DINE AND DONATE

This year, you gave \$15,628!




\$9k

GIVING TUESDAY

This year, you gave \$9,450!

Sustained support enables us to continue to support our students.



\$173

The average donation gift to Westgate in 2025 was \$173.00.

AVERAGE 2025 DONATION



114

114 Westate Alumni donated to Westgate in 2025.

ALUMNI DONORS



960

Altogether, Grade 9 students will complete 960 volunteer work hours this year.

VOLUNTEER HOURS



26

Westgate students and staff volunteered at 26 organizations on Community Service Day.

ORGANIZATIONS



59

59 students are graduating this year.

CLASS OF '26



10

Westgate currently has 10 German and French teachers.

LANGUAGE TEACHERS



13

Westgate students went on 13 Alternative Education trips.

EDUCATION TRIPS



25

25 students received bursaries this year.

BURSARIES

ALUMNI & COMMUNITY NEWS

Share your news with us!

If you'd like to share your news with us, please get in touch with our Alumni Relations Coordinator:

✉ alumni@westgatemennonite.org



Caleb Snider ('14) and Sarah Mulhall got married on September 28th, 2024, at Cibo Waterfront in Winnipeg. It was a beautiful fall day surrounded by friends and family.



Anya Snider ('13) and Jackson Fregeau welcomed their daughter Adelay Jean Snider Fregeau on December 12th, 2025. Anya remarks that they “are loving life as a family of three” and currently live in Vancouver, BC.



Lindsey (Pankratz) Perera ('13) and husband Charlie welcomed their third child, Cohen Don-Peter Perera, October 2025. Congratulations! Pictured: Lindsey, Charlie, Presley Jayne-Ann (2021), Harper Anne (2023) and Cohen (2025).



Joshua Ewert ('07) and Rhema (Prathipati) have been blessed with the arrival of their second child, Jacob Ashir Ewert. Jacob was born on December 5th, 2025, and joins older sister Lily (born 2023) in the growing Ewert family.



Kim Rogalsky ('11) and Ryan Sinclair were married at Bridges Golf Course, October 2025, with many 2011 classmates in attendance.



Erika Gustafson-Fish ('16) and Tanner Graveline welcomed baby Theo Justin Graveline on May 9th, 2025.



Rachel Litz ('14) and Andrew Skorpad welcomed their first baby, James Andrew Skorpad, on January 13th, 2026.



Anika Nelson ('16) and Carrick Friesen got married on November 22nd, 2025. It was a beautiful day full of family, friends, and love.



Nick Epp ('13) and Brooke Epp got married September 2025 surrounded by friends and family.



Tristan Brenneman ('13) and Nicole welcome Marlowe James, born on October 11th, 2025. Family picture with proud older sister Clara Jane (born 2023).



Savannah Baird ('14) and Gavin Gauthier Wiebe are very excited and blessed to welcome their first baby, Soleil Marie Gauthier Wiebe on March 25th, 2025.



Linnea Nelson ('18) and Erik Buchsmann celebrated their marriage on June 8th, 2025 along with friends and family.



Logan Loewen Runke ('16) and Lindsay Dumonceaux were married on Saturday, September 20th, 2025! Nancy Loewen (current teacher and '88 grad) and Steve Ens were happy to celebrate the occasion with close friends and family.



Yasmin Bañares Clark ('18) and Benjamin Clark were married on August 3rd, 2025. They currently live in Grand Rapids, MI, USA. Yasmin recently completed her Master of Business Administration and is continuing to pursue a career in medicine.



Emma Ens-Maclver ('12) and husband Alex Boersch welcome their first child, Léa Kate Boersch, in November 2025. Alex is a grain farmer and Emma is the Executive Director of the Fort la Reine Museum in Portage la Prairie.

Westgate Reunion '73, '74, '75



This past summer, alumni from the graduating classes of 1973, 1974, and 1975 gathered for a special Westgate reunion. In total, 46 classmates were in attendance. It was a meaningful time of reconnecting, sharing stories, and celebrating lasting friendships. A heartfelt thank you to Heidi Howarth (née Henning) for organizing the gathering. She has also graciously summarized the event below.



FROM Heidi Howarth (née Henning) ('75)

In January, I realized it would be 50 years since I graduated from Westgate and began reaching out to classmates from the Class of 1975. What started as a small idea quickly grew, and I decided to include the graduating classes of 1974 and 1973 as well. At first, the task felt daunting — but in the end, I was able to connect with 46 classmates.

On August 9, 2025, we had the incredible opportunity to tour the new Westgate Mennonite Collegiate. We were fascinated by the changes to the new building — the size, the updated art and music rooms, the spacious gym — yet the school's spirit felt as famil-

iar as ever. The grounds, nestled by the Assiniboine River, stirred so many memories from our time there.

What an unforgettable time reconnecting with 25 amazing classmates — 10 of whom traveled from across Canada to be there! We shared countless memories, retold old stories, passed around cherished photos, and laughed as though no time had passed at all.

It was a day filled with joy, nostalgia, and deep gratitude. As we move forward, this reunion reminded us how strong the bonds of shared history can be — and how special it is to be part of the Westgate legacy.

Here's to old friends, lifelong connections, and the memories that continue to bring us back together.

What's new,

collegiate crew?

You're important to us.

We want to keep in touch and learn about the good things that are happening in your life and share what's happening at Westgate.

If you have stories, births, weddings, or other announcements to share, please let us know. If you want to participate or volunteer in any of our events throughout the year, please let us know. If you have an updated address, email, phone or other contact information, **please let us know.**

Please reach out to our Alumni Relations Coordinator to stay in touch.

✉ alumni@westgatemennonite.org