THUNDERBIRD ADVENTIST ACADEMY

Newsletter - December 2025

The Annual Giving Edition



SERVING STUDENTS WITH QUALITY
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EDUCATION
FOR OVER A CENTURY

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MISSION

Our mission is for students to **EXCEL**:

EXperience Jesus
Communicate Clearly & Think Critically
Embrace Service & Citizenship
Live Healthfully in Body and Mind

VISION

Our vision is for our students and staff to **"increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."** - Luke 2:52



Dear Alumni & Friends,

The 2025–26 year is off to a wonderful start, and it is hard to believe we are already nearing the end of 2025. As we enter the holiday and giving season, I would like to share a few highlights from the past year and invite you to continue partnering with us in our mission to help students EXCEL: to Experience Jesus, Communicate clearly and think critically, Embrace service and citizenship, and Live healthfully in body and mind.

Last spring was full of activity with Academy Days, Alumni Weekend, our second annual Golf Tournament, music performances, sports events, and graduation. We celebrated 32 outstanding seniors who together earned more than $3.5 million in scholarships, with 78 percent completing dual credit or AP classes and 63 percent graduating with GPAs of 3.5 or higher. Their success reflects the strong academics, leadership, and spiritual growth that define TAA.

This fall we welcomed new staff and several exciting classes, including Dual Credit Developmental Biology, Calculus and Statistics, and 3D Design, along with continuing favorites such as AP English, CNA, and Aviation Ground School. Enrollment is slightly higher this year, and our athletics and music programs continue to thrive. Thanks to generous donors, we completed Phase 1 of our Auditorium Renovation, which was unveiled during Student Orientation. We look forward to beginning Phase 2 soon.

Your support makes all of this possible. Every gift, large or small, helps us continue providing students with a Christ-centered education that prepares them for life academically, socially, and spiritually. As you consider your year-end giving, I invite you to help us strengthen programs, expand scholarships, and invest in the next generation of TAA students.

Thank you for your continued prayers and generosity. Together we are helping students grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

With Gratitude,

Kerysa Ford

Director of Advancement,
Engagement & Recruitment



“[My teachers] are always so kind and understanding, helping with anything you need help with.” - Sammy, *Freshman*

Ways You Can Help TAA This Giving Season...

At Thunderbird Adventist Academy, we are deeply thankful for the generosity of our TAA family, including parents, alumni, friends, and community partners, who make our mission possible year after year. As we look toward the close of this year and the exciting years ahead, we invite you to partner with us in projects that directly impact our students and strengthen our campus.

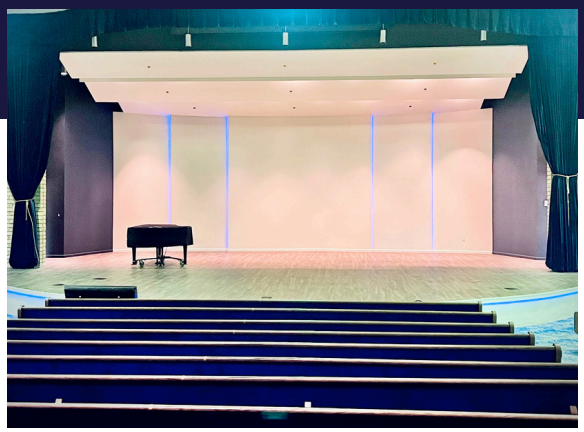
Your gifts, large or small, help our students to EXCEL: to Experience Jesus, Communicate clearly and think Critically, Embrace service and citizenship, and Live healthfully in body and mind.

MAJOR PROJECT 2025–2027:
Auditorium Renovation, Phase 2

For years, we have shared the vision of transforming the TAA Auditorium, the cornerstone of campus life where worship, music, and community come together.

In August of this year, we proudly celebrated the completion of Phase 1 of the renovation. This phase included repairing and expanding the stage floor, adding a sound wall, and installing new lighting, creating a space that is more functional, welcoming, and modern.

Thanks to your generous support, we raised over $50,000 to complete Phase 1. We are now excited to move forward with Phase 2, planned for 2025 to 2027, which will focus on updating the audience seating area with new flooring, upgraded seating, and a refreshed overall look.



How You Can Donate

Online: Visit www.thunderbirdacademy.org to donate quickly and securely.

By Phone: Call 480-948-3300 ext. 105 to make a credit card donation.

By Mail: Send checks to:
Thunderbird Adventist Academy
Attn: Advancement
7410 E Sutton Dr
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

In Person: Stop by our office to donate and say hello!

More Ways You Can Help TAA This Giving Season...

YEAR-END FOCUS: Give the Gift of a Dorm Scholarship



Support our year-end project by contributing to the Dorm Scholarship Fund and help students who live too far to commute or want the full on-campus experience.

Your gift helps to provide students with a safe, nurturing environment where they can EXCEL spiritually, academically, socially, and personally.

Every donation opens doors for more students to join TAA, including those from other states and countries such as Brazil and Rwanda.

Support Academics: Give the Gift of Christian Education



The Worthy Student Fund ensures that finances never stand in the way of a deserving student. Your donation provides tuition assistance so students can learn, grow, and EXCEL in a Christ-centered environment.

Every gift helps students achieve their academic goals and embrace a Christian education.

Brick by Brick: Help Us Refresh Campus Landscaping



After two scorching summers and water challenges, our beloved rose bushes didn't survive. We're reimagining this space with alumni in mind. Donate $100 to have a personalized brick added to the walkway in front of the auditorium as part of our refreshed landscaping.

> I love the connections you make while living here. It's great making friends during the school day, but all those moments I share with my dorm-mates is what truly defines my friendships and allows me to connect with my friends on a deeper level.
>
> - Vania, *Senior*

Why I Give

A YOUNG ALUMNUS PERSPECTIVE

By Gabriela Lozano
Class of 2025

Together, we make a Difference

Recent graduate Gabriela Lozano (Class of 2025) gives faithfully because she wants others to experience the same opportunities she did at TAA. She believes every gift—whether $10 or $1,000—helps the school thrive and makes a real difference. After graduating with high honors, Gabriela enrolled at Arizona State University and was accepted there into the Barret, The Honors College.

"Having attended TAA for all four years, I can confidently say that the experiences, values, and relationships I built there will stay with me throughout my life. TAA strengthened my spiritual life, gave me a supportive community, and pushed me to grow academically. My teachers were more than just educators, they were mentors and people who genuinely cared about me as a whole person. I will always be very grateful to have been surrounded by such a loving and supporting environment.

I also loved being involved in the many opportunities TAA had to offer, some of them being Student Association, National Honor Society, Acro, and band. Each one allowed me to develop leadership, confidence, and meaningful friendships. I choose to give back, so future students can continue to experience these same opportunities. Even a small contribution can truly make a difference in a student's experience.

I am excited to see TAA continue to build a strong and supportive community where



students can thrive. I hope others will consider giving back in whatever way they are able, to help TAA continue creating the environment students deserve. Thank you to the faculty and staff who poured into me, I will cherish all the lessons I learned, and I pray the mission continues to grow."

Thank you, Gaby! We're proud of you and thank you for your thoughtfulness toward future TAA students!



Honoring the Past, Building the Future at Thunderbird Academy

For decades, the northern part of Thunderbird Academy's campus has held cherished memories, from maintenance buildings and the old furniture factory to airplane hangars where aviation students learned. Alumni and staff alike remember the hands-on learning, the friendships, and the sense of community that thrived within those spaces.

Over time, some of these buildings grew tired and in need of updates. Coupled with the growing demand for land in Scottsdale, leasing part of the back campus provided an opportunity to generate significant income for the academy. While it is bittersweet to see several buildings go, one hangar remains, preserving a tangible link to the past and a reminder of all that generations of students learned there.

Looking ahead, Thunderbird Academy is planning a state-of-the-art maintenance facility that will house modern classrooms, hands-on workshops, and spaces for woodshop, auto mechanics, and aviation, programs that alumni remember fondly. During the 2025 Alumni Weekend, the academy broke ground on this project. The area near the water tower has been cleared, and construction is set to begin soon, giving current students the same immersive experiences that made Thunderbird Academy special.

Aviation enthusiasts would be happy to know that the academy retains rights to the taxiway to the Scottsdale Airport, and the new facility will include an airplane pad, keeping Thunderbird's connection to flight alive.



Nathan Chipman-Bonden, former Maintenance Director, looks over the plans at Alumni Weekend 2025.

As Thunderbird Academy builds for the future, it does so with gratitude for its past. Alumni, friends, and supporters are invited to continue their prayers and contributions, helping ensure that Thunderbird Academy continues to soar for generations to come.

A MAYDAY TO ALUMNI:
HELP TAA TAKE FLIGHT



By Janice (Phillips) Steyn
Class of 1974

Arizona Academy officially became Thunderbird when the school moved from Phoenix and graduated its first class in 1950. The middle name Adventist was added in 1974. Thunderbird Field II graduated over 5,500 male and female World War II pilots. After the war, the U.S. Government wanted to divest itself of this site.

Around the same time, the Arizona Conference was in the process of discussing the relocation of the Academy. Prescott was their likeliest choice, since they owned the land around Camp Yavapines.

There were several religious entities who were interested in purchasing the land in Scottsdale. O.M. “Phil” Phillips, the Paradise Valley Reclamation Supervisor, desired the property to be sold to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

After the 649 acres were purchased, Thunderbird initiated their flight program, with many young people desiring to become mission pilots. Years later, the City of Scottsdale approached the school to create their airport, with the understanding that Thunderbird would always have runway access.



Some faces of the last Arizona Academy students as the school transitioned to Thunderbird Academy. See Mel Phillips in the 2nd row.

Dr. Mel Phillips was a proud Arizona Academy graduate and private pilot. He gave a significant contribution to reactivate the flight school, which had not functioned for many years. However, after Adventist World Aviation repossessed their aircraft, the program has only consisted of ground school and a flight simulator.

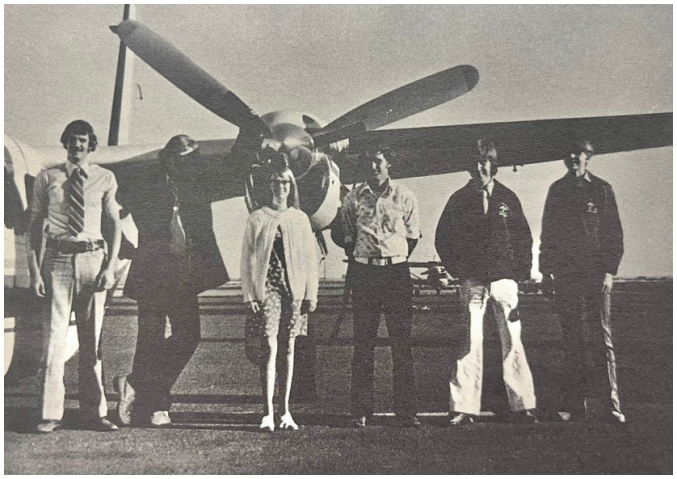
Thunderbird has broken ground and is clearing the land to begin the new maintenance building construction. The facility incorporates an airplane tie-down and classrooms.

Attention all Thunderbird Adventist Academy pilots, past and present: MAYDAY. Our school requires a plane. Cessna no longer produces 150s and 152s, which means the used models exist from 1977–1985. A new 172 Skyhawk costs $400,000. If our alumni and friends would consider a donation, for instance, of $1,000 by four hundred of us, ownership could be assured.

Won't you encourage our students to experience "High Flight," so aptly described by John Gillespie Magee Jr. in his sonnet: slip the bonds of Earth, dance on laughter-silvered wings, climb into sun-split clouds, chase the shouting wind, top the heights with grace, and tread the sanctity of space?

By Janice (Phillips) Steyn
Class of 1974

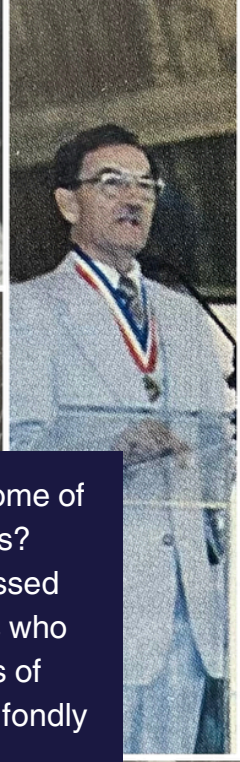




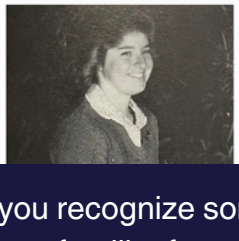




From the Director of Advancement, Engagement & Recruitment:
Thunderbird Adventist Academy continues to operate a ground school program led by pilot Derrick Heisey, supported by newly upgraded flight-simulator technology. With our new Maintenance area designed with space for an aircraft, we share the author's hope of one day returning our students to the sky. At this stage, we are gathering pledges to help us plan responsibly for a future aircraft purchase. If you're interested in pledging support, please contact Kerysa Ford at 480-948-3300 extension 105 or kford@taaschool.org.

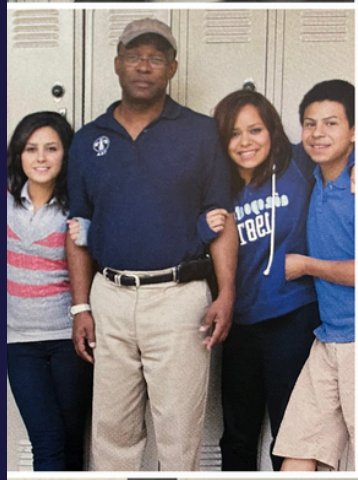



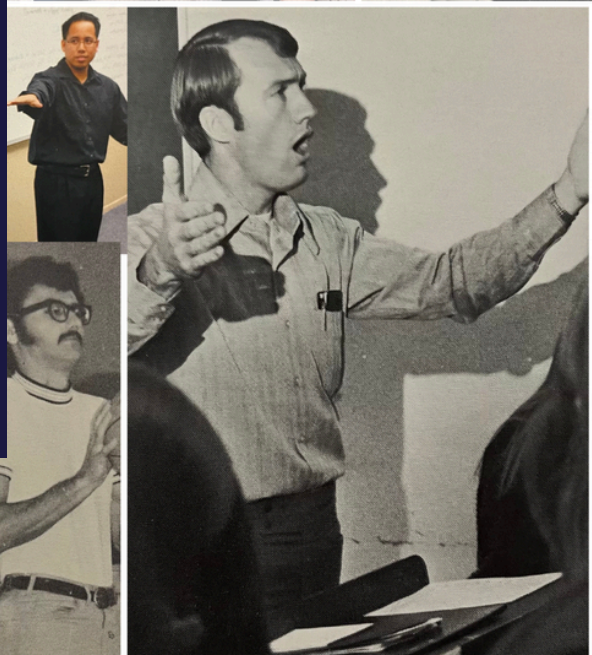


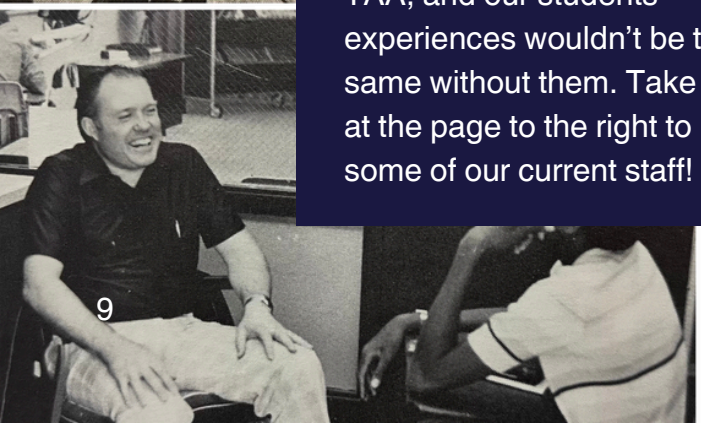














Do you recognize some of these familiar faces? TAA has been blessed with incredible educators who have shaped generations of students. Mr. Johnson is fondly remembered for his "relationship advice," Taco Bell runs, and computer rescues, while Wayne Longhofer shared that what motivated his work at TAA was "the realization that one is doing an important and necessary work." Elder Ruddle was known for always being there - caring, understanding, and giving - and Mrs. Silva served so faithfully and consistently you could set your clock by her (as could a few campus cats). Mr. Barber's groan-worthy jokes kept things fun, Miss Staddon was always helping someone somewhere, and Mr. Cossentine instilled self-discipline in his students. Our teachers are the heart of TAA, and our students' experiences wouldn't be the same without them. Take a look at the page to the right to meet some of our current staff!

TAA Staff Spotlight

Get to know some of our current educators!



Roselaine Gorospe – VP of Academics, Registrar, and English 9 teacher. Mrs. G. brings 15 years of experience in Adventist education to her first year at TAA. A UC Irvine graduate in English with a minor in Education, she and her husband Jayson are proud parents of 5-year-old Gerrit, along with their pets Rocky and Toothless. She's grateful to be part of a God-led community full of inspiring stories and dedicated people.



Jacob Prosser – Head Boys Dean and Bible II teacher. Jacob earned a BS in Physical Education from Walla Walla University and is in his seventh year at TAA. He and his wife Jess share their home with two wiener dogs, Wally and Winnie. Jake loves being part of a close, Christ-centered community where he can share with students what God has done in his life and guide them in discovering what He wants to do in theirs.



Grecia Campos – Head Girls Dean & Bible I teacher. Grecia earned a B.S. in Liberal Studies from Pacific Union College in 2010 and has been in Adventist education since 2011, this being her first year at TAA as Head Girls Dean. She and her husband Brian have three children—Benjamin, Sofi, and Eli—along with their pets Maya and Bane. Grecia loves building relationships with students, sharing laughter and tears, and showing them the love of Jesus every day.



J.R. Thimsen – Acro Coach, Computers & Languages Teacher, and E-Sports Coach. J.R. holds two BAs from Andrews University and an MA from Lincoln Christian University, and is in his 19th year at TAA. He and his wife Kasia have two children, Ryden and Kiara, and two dogs, Ronin and Azumi. J.R. loves that each day at TAA is unique and fulfilling, guiding students in both academic and personal growth, with the bonus of working alongside great staff.



Lizeth Barraza – VP of Finance. Lizeth holds a Master's in Education from Instituto del Desierto de Santa Ana and has five years in Adventist education, including three at TAA. She and her husband Jonathan have a blended family of six children: Jon Jr., Jacy, Jaslyn, Alem, Kathleen, and Jaden. Liz loves serving students and families alongside a supportive staff, seeing TAA as a place where they can help every child grow closer to God.

Stay tuned to future newsletters—both digital and print—to meet even more of our amazing staff!

Alumni Weekend
April 10–12, 2026

“Trust for the Journey”

We can’t wait to welcome you back for Alumni Weekend! Mark your calendars for April 10–12—you won’t want to miss it!

Honor Classes:
1951, 1956, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021

Friday, April 10

- Registration Open: 6:00 pm
- Vespers: 7:00 pm (Auditorium)
- Afterglow: 8:30–9:30 pm

Sabbath, April 11

- Registration Open: 9:30 am
- Church: 11:00 am (Auditorium)
- Honor Class Photos: After Church (Auditorium)
- Lunch: After Church (Cafeteria)
- Dorm Open House: 2:30-3:45 pm (Dorms)
- What’s New @ TAA?: 5:30 pm (Auditorium)
- Sundown Worship at the Fire Pit: 6:30 pm
- Alumni vs. Staff/Students Basketball Game: 7:15 pm (Gym)

Sunday, April 12

- Golf Tournament at Orange Tree Golf Resort, Scottsdale, AZ

Come reconnect, reminisce, and celebrate with fellow alumni. We can’t wait to see you there!







SAVE THE DATE

THUNDERBIRD ADVENTIST ACADEMY
SPIRITUAL PHYSICAL MENTAL
1920

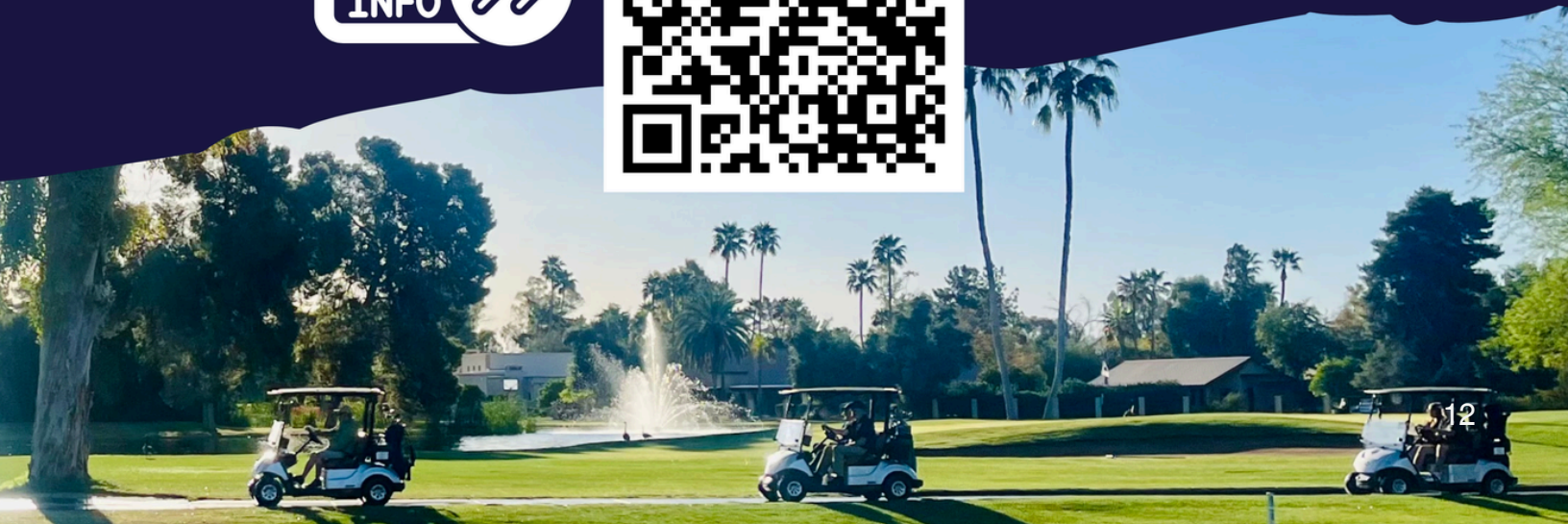
3RD ANNUAL TAA GOLF TOURNAMENT

PROCEEDS WILL HELP FUND PHASE 2 OF THE
TAA AUDITORIUM RENOVATION

APR 12 | ORANGE TREE GOLF RESORT

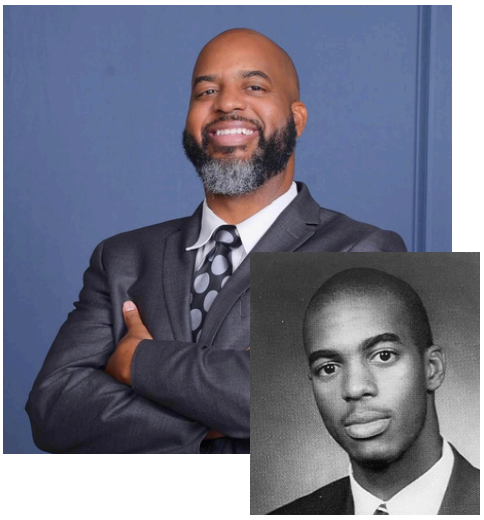
EARLYBIRD REGISTRATION OPENS DECEMBER 1, 2025

MORE INFO



Alumni Weekend Speakers

FRIDAY EVENING VESPERS - JERROLD THOMPSON, CLASS OF 1996



Dr. Jerrold N. Thompson Sr., a proud member of the Thunderbird Adventist Academy Class of 1996, serves as the Senior Pastor of the San Bernardino Community SDA Church. Under his dynamic leadership, the church has experienced remarkable growth spiritually, financially, and numerically. His impactful initiatives include hosting one of the city's largest health weekends, serving over 700 patients with free optometry and dental care; establishing the U.S. Dream Academy Learning Center to support children of incarcerated parents; partnering with JCPenney for "Christmas in July" to provide students with clothing and shoes; and developing plans for a Faith, Health, and Education Center focused on mental wellness.

A respected community leader, Dr. Thompson has been recognized by senators, congressmen, and local officials, and has received numerous awards, including the prestigious Black Rose. He has conducted evangelistic campaigns and weeks of prayer around the world, baptizing more than 1,500 people. In addition to pastoring, he is an author, adjunct professor, business owner, and founder of Common Ground Life, a speaking and consulting initiative aimed at inspiring and empowering others, especially students through educational assemblies. Above all, Dr. Thompson is a devoted father and follower of Jesus Christ, passionate about serving God and making a lasting difference in the lives of others.

SABBATH MORNING CHURCH - DONALD KEELE, JR., CLASS OF 1976



Don Keele Jr., a proud member of Thunderbird Adventist Academy's Class of 1976 and this year's 50-Year Honor Class, has dedicated his life to ministry and service. The son of former Thunderbird principal and Arizona Conference education director Don Keele Sr., Don followed in his father's footsteps of leadership and faith. After 44 years in children's, youth, and young adult ministry, he retired in June 2025 as the Young Adult Ministry and Adventist Christian Fellowship Director for the Georgia-Cumberland Conference.

Now launching his own ministry consulting business, BetterDay Ministry Consulting, LLC, Don continues to use his gifts to coach churches and pastors, conduct leadership and ministry trainings, and help establish Adventist Christian Fellowship chapters on public university campuses. He is also a frequent speaker at churches, youth and young adult retreats, and pastors' conventions.

Don lives in Calhoun, Georgia, with his wife of 44 years, Sandy. They have two adult children: Andrea, Associate Chaplain for Student Missions at Walla Walla University, and Donnie III, who works in Research and Development at UltraCamp in Niles, Michigan, alongside his wife, Rachel, Director of the Andreasen Wellness Center at Andrews University.

In Loving Memory

This year, we pause to remember and honor members of our TAA family who have been laid to rest. Each one leaves behind a legacy of friendship, faith, and shared memories that continue to shape our community. We celebrate their lives even as we feel their absence.

We remember:

Al Ghelfi ’57, Larry Engel ’59, Joe Zappa ’61, Harley Chambers ’61, Karen Edwards Roehl ’76, Danny Birmingham ’79, Gareth Haycock ’98, Tom Mattson ’64, Judy Strand Barcelo ’69, John GreyEyes ’85, Donna Walter Yoke ’64, Gail Perkins ’65, Lolita Nick Knepp ’73, Karla Spaulding-Huft ’83, Jason Hughes ’99, Nora Kathy Truex Bush ’58, Sara Bucalo-Lawton ’68, Sherry Kriner Tullock ’69, Christy K. Robinson ’76, Steve Gerard ’88.

We also honor the dedicated service of **Ron Russell, former principal; Joy Russell, former accountant; Ted Evans, former boys’ dean; and Richard (Dick) Poulson, former furniture foreman and manager.**

These friends and mentors blessed our campus with their presence, their stories, and their hearts. We look forward to the promise of the resurrection morning, when “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” (Revelation 21:4)

Until then, we hold their memory close, and we look forward to the day we will see them again.

We’d love to hear from you!

Want to update your contact info, contribute to a future newsletter, find out more info about Alumni weekend, let us know!

(480) 948 - 3300 ext 105

kford@taaschool.org

www.thunderbirdacademy.org

Thunderbird Adventist Academy
7410 E Sutton Dr
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

