



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Virginia Beach Friends School: September 2024

www.vbfschool.org/about/alumni

DR. RYAN CLELAND '11

BY: ANNA FACEMIRE, DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

For Ryan Cleland (2011), a proud alumnus of Virginia Beach Friends School, the years spent at this small, nurturing Quaker institution were nothing short of special. From the tight-knit community to the unique educational philosophy, Ryan credits much of his personal and academic development to the time he spent at the school.

After attending Friends School from 7th-12th grade, Ryan went on to attend William and Mary where he studied biology and excelled academically, a testament to the solid foundation built at Friends School. Upon completion of schooling at William and Mary, he attended Lincoln Memorial University College of Veterinary Medicine where he met his wife. As newlyweds, they live (with their 3 cats!)

just outside of Pittsburgh where both he and his wife are practicing veterinarians. He believes his love of nature and math that developed at Friends School led him to his current career.

The Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship (SPICES) that guide the school's curriculum had a lasting impact. These values weren't just theoretical—they were woven into everyday interactions. Weekly Meeting for Worship helped Ryan learn to center himself at a young age and as a veterinarian, job stress can be expected and so being mindful and grounded helps him navigate the day to day challenges.

In addition to excelling academically, Ryan was an active member of the sports community at Virginia Beach Friends School, playing both basketball and soccer throughout his time here. As a standout soccer athlete, he not only developed physical skills but also learned the importance of teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. "Playing sports at Friends School taught me valuable life lessons," Ryan reflects. "Whether on the basketball court or soccer field, we weren't just competing—we were



learning how to work together, overcome challenges, and support one another." His involvement in athletics was a key part of his holistic development, reinforcing the school's commitment to fostering community. Ryan spoke highly of basketball coach, Coach Tony, and his 6 person team that inevitably pushed him to be in the best physical shape of his life!

"One of the things that made my experience so special was how the teachers really got to know me. They didn't just teach lessons; they helped me discover my passions and strengths," Ryan recalls. "It felt like I wasn't just a number, there was a sense of powerful belonging." Two of his favorites were Teacher Jeff and Teacher Barb who both even made an appearance in the photo slideshow at his recent wedding.

Whether it was through group projects, service-learning initiatives, or the school's meaningful Meeting for Worship, where students gathered for silent reflection, the bonds formed with classmates was enduring. Even today, Ryan remains close with many of his classmates (6 attended his wedding!) and mentors, a testament to the lifelong connections nurtured at the school. Our alumni representative, Alex Dworetzky (2014), says, "Ryan was an incredible role model for the school. His leadership through sports and extracurriculars was something many looked up to."

Ryan shared a few standout memories including when his class took a field trip to First Landing State Park for a camping trip and they were able to hold a memorable Meeting for Worship in a treehouse. Another highlight was the overnight lock-ins, where students stayed at the school for a night filled with fun, laughter, and bonding. These events, a beloved tradition, allowed students to relax and connect outside the classroom in a unique way. Ryan's most favorite memory was participating in the WHRO Great Computer Challenge. The WHRO Great Computer Challenge is an annual competition designed to engage students in various technology-related challenges. Ryan's team won first place!



As an alumnus, Ryan hopes to inspire current students to take full advantage of everything Virginia Beach Friends School has to offer and to cherish their time here as much as he did. Virginia Beach Friends School was more than just a school—it was a home, a place of growth, and a foundation for a fulfilling life. The lessons learned, the friendships made, and the values instilled continue to shape his journey long after graduation. "I'll always be grateful for my time at Friends School. It's a place where you're encouraged to be yourself, think deeply, and to care about others and the world around us. I wouldn't trade my experience."