

# TA NEWS



A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, ALUMNI, AND FRIENDS OF TAKOMA ACADEMY.

## Turning Mechanical Engineering Into Mars Exploration

*Arturo Rankin Ph.D. '81* and his colleagues in California are literally doing some work that is out of this world.

Working on the Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover project, Rankin and his Joint Propulsion Laboratory and NASA teammates are operating a planetary surface exploration device, or a rover, to seek signs of ancient life and retain samples of rock and broken rock and soil. Rankin, who has worked for JPL 25 years in April, is the Robotic Operations deputy team chief for JPL, based in Los Angeles.

Rankin attributes part of his career success to two instructors and his



parents. Growing up on Lincoln Avenue in Takoma Park, about a mile from campus, he attended Sligo Elementary School for first through eighth grades before his four years at TA. He is grateful that his parents made financial sacrifices to send him and his four siblings to Adventist schools.

*Mario Rankin '77* and *Tony Rankin '80* attended TA, while younger brother Ricardo Rankin attended for ninth and tenth grade, before transferring to Forest Lake Academy in Orlando, Fla., where he graduated in 1985. Youngest sibling Anita Rankin attended Shenandoah Valley Academy and graduated in 1985.

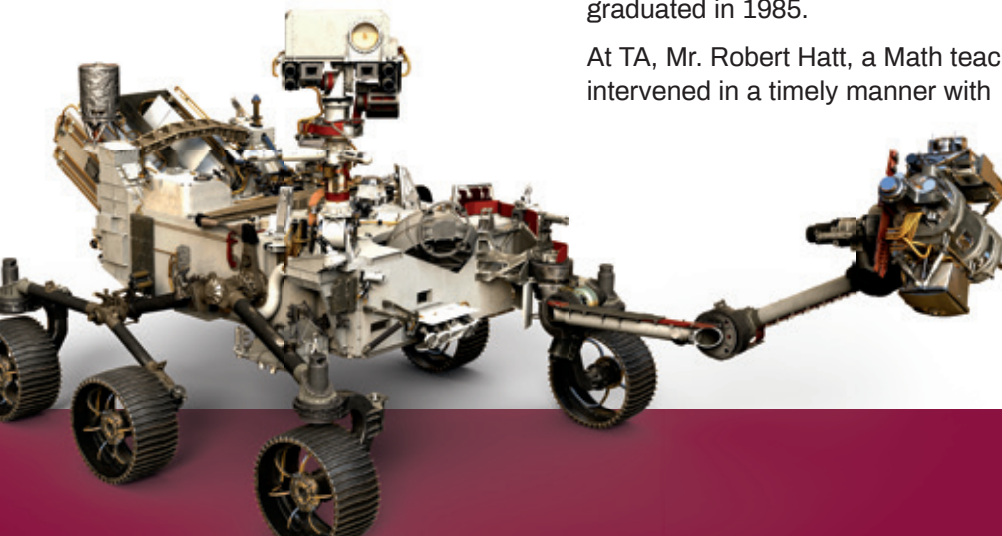
At TA, Mr. Robert Hatt, a Math teacher, intervened in a timely manner with

Rankin after the student received a poor test score in Algebra. "I appreciated Mr. Hatt asking me to stop by his office after school, talking to me about what was going on in my personal life, and encouraging me to make my schoolwork a priority and to do my best," Rankin said.

At Southern Missionary College, now Southern Adventist University, after three semesters, Rankin was unsure what to major in, unclear how he could apply his interest in Math into a career. During a discussion with his Math teacher, Prof. Robert C. Moore (who now teaches at Andrews University), Rankin learned about various fields of engineering. "Biomedical engineering caught my interest," he said during a recent email interview.

Rankin transferred to Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he studied Mechanical Engineering in a program that has biomedical engineering focus. He later earned Master of Science and Ph.D. degrees in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Florida.

At the University of Florida, Rankin participated in a research project that helped propel him toward his work at JPL. He was a research assistant on a project that turned a Kawasaki Mule All-terrain vehicle into a robotic vehicle. His work focused on path planning and path execution software for robotic vehicles. "It was fun writing software and then hanging off the side of the Kawasaki Mule to see how well it performed driving across a football field (at 3mph) under computer control," he recalled.



In Los Angeles, where Rankin moved in 1997 upon accepting a job offer with JPL, Rankin is on his third Mars rover project that he has worked on, and he helps manage the Rover Planner, Sampling and Caching, Mobility downlink, Robotic Arm downlink, and Helicopter Integration Engineer teams. He started as a mobility downlink analyst for the Mars Exploration Rovers Spirit and Opportunity, and then as the Mobility downlink team lead and Flight Software team lead for the Mars Science Laboratory Curiosity rover.

Since the Perseverance rover landed on Mars in February, 2021, it has driven 8,579,740 meters and collected eight rock core samples, as of early April. Under current plans, the rock and soil samples that Perseverance collects will be retrieved by the Mars Sample Return mission and returned to Earth.

Rankin's favorite TA classes were Electronics, taught by Mr. John Gibson, and Aviation, where Mr. Tom Peterson served as instructor. Rankin said he appreciates the "dedicated and caring" teachers at TA "who train up young people in the way they should go." His best subject was Math. In addition, he played junior varsity basketball his sophomore year and participated in the Aviation Club his senior year.



*Dr. Arturo Rankin at a field test at Dumont Dunes, California in 2014.*



*The 1978-1979 TA JV Boys basketball team. Arturo Rankin is second from left in the back row.*

"I enjoyed the friendships formed with my classmates," Rankin said of his time at TA. "Some of us had been in school together since first grade, and new friendships were forged at TA with classmates who had gone to JNA and other elementary schools. I enjoyed roaming the halls of TA with friends, playing basketball in the gym, and going on camping and ski trips with friends."

Rankin's outside interests include researching family history and the early Adventist missionaries to Central America.



*Aviation Club (1980-1981). Arturo Rankin is on the far left in the front row.*

## Editor's Note

Welcome to the first issue of TA News, a newsletter for alumni, parents, and friends of Takoma Academy!

Work is a key part of our lives. God created us with a purpose and meaning to our lives, and for the vast majority of us, going to school and working are key aspects to our mission in life, places where we can discover and develop our talents and desire to serve other people.

In this issue of TA News, we are featuring TA alumni from various parts of the school's history, and they told us about their education at TA and what they have been doing since then. We spoke with the retired executive director of Los Alamos National Laboratories, a space engineer, and a young alumnus who graduated from Carnegie Mellon University and recently launched his own business.

We also have profiled three longtime TA teachers who have retired after this school year, having left indelible impressions on the lives of students whom they have helped form.

Please let us know what you think about this issue. Do you have news to report for upcoming issues, including weddings, births, retirements, promotions, and other key life events? Would you like to be added to our mailing list to receive the newsletter, if you are not receiving it already? Are there alumni and former teachers/staff whom you would like to see us feature in future issues?

Thank you for spending some time with us.

**Bill Murray**  
bmurray@ta.edu

# Longtime Spanish Teacher Set to Retire

After a dozen years on the staff, it's clear that Takoma Academy has earned a place in Mrs. Nora Ramos' heart.

She chokes up a bit when thinking about moving on from her position as Spanish teacher, which she has held since 2010.

"I will miss all of the students and the teachers," said the native of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, shortly before she teared up.

When she thinks of TA, she also thinks of John Nevins Andrews School in Takoma Park, where she taught Music. JNA, as the school was commonly known, was merged with Sligo Adventist School, effective in July 2017, to form Takoma Academy Preparatory School. Her children, Carolina Ramos '99, Ruben Ramos, Jr. '01, and Valeria Ramos '04, all attended JNA and TA, after starting off at Beltsville Adventist Academy.

Because of her work at JNA (1995-2010) and the school being a feeder institution to TA, Mrs. Ramos taught some students from first through 12th grade between Music and Spanish. She worked as a teacher for more than 30 years, starting in Argentina.

At the same time, she and her husband allowed their children to attend college in Argentina, so they did not see their children as often during those years.

For more than 25 years, the routine of driving her children to school and then to work – taking New Hampshire Avenue to Piney Branch Road, followed by the turn on to Carroll Avenue – was a part of her life she came to embrace and love. While the commute did not change, she sees technology as a change agent for teachers, as well as an issue that can sometimes distract students.

A woman of Italian descent, Mrs. Ramos attended the River Plate



Adventist University in her native city. There, she met her future husband, Ruben Ramos, Sr. After they came to the United States, he was ordained an Adventist minister. He serves as vice president for Multicultural Ministries for the Columbia Union Conference.

As a Christian educator, Mrs. Ramos sees the teacher as integrating the academic, moral, and spiritual needs of her students, and she has come to appreciate this holistic, Adventist approach. She has hoped that her work can help prepare students for service in the church and community in the future. "Our mission is to prepare students to be good citizens in the world now, as well as in the world to come."

"They have a lot of energy," she notes of her students.

Mrs. Ramos hopes to travel more in retirement, some of which will likely involve her husband's ministerial work. In addition, she is expecting her eighth grandchild this month, and she hopes to spend more time with her children and grandchildren in Florida and Maryland. She plans to give private piano and Spanish lessons from home and would like to continue to be of service in the community.

Ruben Ramos, Jr., following in his father's footsteps, is a pastor in the Florida Conference of Seventh Day Adventists. Carolina works as an administrative assistant in the Columbia Union Conference in the Ministerial Department. Valeria is a nurse who just had her fourth child; she enjoys homeschooling.

One highlight of her work at TA was educational trips to Europe, Morocco, and South Africa. She also enjoyed cooking Latin meals with her students in class from time to time and attending Latin Cultural Festivals with them.

"I'm keeping those memories as great experiences that I had with my students. They are memories I won't ever forget of spending time with the students and travelling together."



## Takoma Academy: Wall of Fame

**Hosted by:** Fundraising Brick  
**Engraved Brick Order Deadline:** Ongoing

For additional information regarding our engraved brick campaign.



**Order a brick for \$250.00-\$500.00 to support TA's track renovation**  
<https://www.fundraisingbrick.com/online-orders/takomaacademy/>

# Dunbar Henri to Retire

After growing up a missionary's son and living in four different countries, C. Dunbar Henri decided it was time to lay down roots.

He came to Takoma Academy to teach full-time in 1986, after serving as an instructor for one TA class the previous year while he worked as youth pastor at Takoma Park Adventist Church.

Born in Liberia, a land that was colonized by African-Americans in the 19th century, he lived in another West African country, one of the first in the region to gain independence from a colonial power and embrace democracy, Ghana, until he was 8 years old. After some time in Michigan, Orlando, Fla., and Atlanta, it was off to Kenya in East Africa before attending high school in the Lebanese capital of Beirut, as his father labored hard to build church communities in those places. When Lebanon erupted in a civil war in 1973, it was time for Henri to leave the Middle East, after he had enrolled at Middle East College.

"I always tell my (students) that they need to get outside this country to appreciate it," Henri said.

During the last 36 years, Mr. Henri has served as a Bible teacher and administrator, including two stints as TA principal from 1995 to 1997 and 2005 to 2009. During his first time as principal, he became the first Black leader of TA. He has also served as vice principal.

Before making history, though, he had to discern that he had a calling to teach, rather than be a minister. He attributes his pull to teaching in part to having some "horrible" Bible teachers when he was growing up, in addition to a few good ones.

He received his Master's of Divinity from Andrews University in 1983, after beginning his studies in 1981. He had previously received his bachelor's degree in 1979 from Oakwood College (now University) in Huntsville, Ala.,



after previously studying at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and Middle East College. After 18 months of singing and traveling with The Heritage Singers out of Placerville, Calif., he pastored three Maryland churches from 1983-1986 before joining TA's staff full-time, just as another job opportunity in Ohio had presented itself.

After he came to TA, Mr. Henri put himself wholeheartedly into the work. In addition to teaching Bible classes, he would play basketball with students after school and spent many hours on campus each week, in some ways replicating his father's dedication to being a missionary, which sometimes resulted in not always being physically present for his family.

This school year, Mr. Henri has been teaching ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students.

"You're old enough to make a decision," about following God, he likes to inform his students. He tells his students that God doesn't want a lukewarm, half-hearted commitment and wants their entire commitment or nothing at all.

"A majority of Christians are that way," he said of lukewarmness. "We're not really Christian, except when it's to our advantage."

Mr. Henri has seen TA change

considerably since 1986, when there were nearly 400 student enrolled. Now, with fewer than 180 students, TA is much more black and brown than it was in the 1980s, when there were a significant number of white and South Asian students. Henri and his wife of 42 years, Deborah Henri, sent their two children, Cara Henri Wright '01 and Christopher Henri '05, to TA.

"Kids are kids," regardless of skin color, Mr. Henri said of TA students. In his classes and work as an administrator, Mr. Henri has initiated and maintained a strong focus on discipline and responsibility, which is part of the reason why Columbia Union Conference officials have tapped him repeatedly to be a school administrator.

He plans to continue driving for Lyft, the ride sharing service, on Friday and Sunday mornings for four or five hours in his 2014 Fiat 500L. He enjoys this weekly ritual and plans to continue it. He jokes that he will try not to do "too much damage" to his house in Beltsville, with home improvement projects.

He would also like to travel more with his wife, who works part-time in the Business Office at TA. In retirement, Mr. Henri also might take a part-time teaching job.

"If I go there," he said of future missionary trips, "I won't be taking my kids," he jokes of his students.

"I'll miss the kids," he confesses about how retirement will be. He'll also miss coming to school and grading tests and working with his colleagues.

## DID YOU KNOW?

One of our seniors, Dylan, was named Player of the Year in basketball for the 2021-2022 Maryland Independent School Athletic League. Dylan is a 6'2" shooting guard.

# From TA, Managing the Nuclear Stockpile at Los Alamos

Living 8,750 square feet above sea level in New Mexico, *Charles McMillan, Ph.D. '73*, has time these days to think about life.

He had a momentous time during his 35-year career. After earning a doctoral degree in Physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1983, he ascended the ladder of government-based research, culminating in his serving as director at Los Alamos National Laboratories from 2011 to 2017 overseeing an annual budget of \$2.5 billion, with 10,500 employees, before he retired.

In addition to testifying before Congress numerous times, McMillan had to sign an annual report to the U.S. president certifying the condition of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile under Los Alamos' oversight. He wrestled with issues related to the morality of nuclear war and has concluded that nuclear weapons are a strong deterrent, and they help explain why the world has not seen a world war since the 1940s.

"When you see the photos from Ukraine, you realize that war is a terrible thing," he said of Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

Keeping nuclear weapons ready for use can be very challenging, in part because some of the parts and equipment from when the weapons were developed from the 1960s through the 1980s are no longer commercially available.

He also had to be vigilant about foreign nationals, who play a key role at Los Alamos National Laboratories and similar research institutions, and security leaks to foreign nations. "Italians and Germans played a strong role in the Manhattan Project," he said of the United States' program to develop nuclear weapons in the 1940s.

After studying Physics and Math at Columbia Union College, now



Washington Adventist University, McMillan got married to his wife, *Janet Robb McMillan '73*, whom he met at TA. The couple journeyed to Zambia for a year to teach through an Adventist mission. They have been married for 45 years.

In some ways, McMillan followed the footsteps of his father, who was a Physicist who worked for the Army as a civilian at Fort Belvoir, Va. "I have very strong, positive memories," of his father, he said. At MIT, McMillan developed an interest in electronics and acoustics.

His TA memories include his teachers, such as Jim Borchers, a Math instructor who taught Geography, Hal Landis, Mrs. Valerie K. Landis, English teacher, and Robert B. Hatt, Jr., a Math teacher who taught Algebra I and II and Trigonometry before passing away suddenly in 1985.

McMillan describes Math as "the language of science," and he learned to speak this language at TA. He also appreciates longtime principal, the late Mr. J.P. "Prof" Lawrence's commitment to excellence at TA.

From his English classes, he learned to write and speak clearly, skills that have been very important to his professional success. "You have to be well prepared," he said of a dozen testimonies he gave before the Senate

Armed Services Committee and the House Armed Services Committee during his seven years leading Los Alamos.

From 1983 to 2005, McMillan provided technical assistance to the federal government at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, through a contract that University of California at Berkeley held. He focuses on optics, radiography, high explosives research, in addition to leadership development. In 2005, the Department of Energy put its work at Los Alamos out to bid, leading University of California and Bechtel to bid. A key part of the University of California at Berkeley team, he came to Los Alamos in 2006 to manage Los Alamos' \$1.5 billion weapons program.

Since he retired in 2018, McMillan enjoys traveling more with his wife. In addition to playing the organ, McMillan began playing the recorder in his youth and has become such an aficionado of Baroque music that he arranged to examine four of George Friedrich Handel's (1685-1759) six recorder sonatas during a visit to Cambridge, England. McMillan also enjoys astrophotography, taking photos of the night sky and gaining a further appreciation of nature and the universe.

## CLASS OF 2022 CONGRATULATIONS

TA congratulates the Class of 2022 seniors, as they approach their graduation on June 5.

**Admissions offers at more than 135 colleges and universities.**

**More than \$1 million in scholarships secured.**

# Young Alumnus Takes on New Opportunities



Mecca Parker '15 appears to have no aversion to challenges.

When he enrolled at Takoma Academy, he decided to lace up cleats and play soccer for the first time because his TA friends were kicking the round ball as a fall sport, followed by basketball in the winter and track and field as a spring sport. Drafted to play goalie in soccer, Parker made the TA varsity team and used his speed to good effect, showing courage when opposing players bore down on his goal. Enrolling at TA had been a homecoming of sorts, since Mecca's parents are alumni of Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University), and he was born at Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park.

After playing power forward and small forward on the TA basketball team, Mecca enrolled at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, where he shifted to playing point guard and shooting guard for three years. "I learned a lot, transitioning to my new position," he recalled, during a video interview from his home in Laurel.

In addition to playing basketball and studying for his classes, Mecca participated in student government, just as he had at TA. He took tests in hotel rooms during basketball

season and completed homework assignments on the team bus when necessary.

Knowing that he did well in Math classes during his primary and middle school years, Mecca enrolled in as many Advanced Placement classes as he could at TA. He found himself taking Algebra II as a ninth grader at TA with sophomores and completed three Math classes in high school with Mr. Alban Howe, then the Math Department chair, whom he described as "extremely intelligent" and "my favorite teacher of all time," an instructor who had a ping pong table in his classroom, which Mecca would occasionally use on Fridays.

Mecca enjoyed the camaraderie that formed between him and 10 other male TA students, during getaway weekends at Mr. Howe's family's Maryland cabin, where, unencumbered by their cell phones, given the lack of reception in the mountains, they went sledding, hay riding, and fetching water from a well. "It was a completely different way of living," existing closer to nature, Mecca remarked. Mr. Howe now teaches Math at a private K-12 school in Seattle.

Mecca's proficiency in Math, in part, led him to enroll at Carnegie Mellon and study Mechanical Engineering there, receiving his bachelor's degree in 2019. While the adjustment to college-level work was an initial challenge for Mecca, he notes that many other students also struggled, and that TA prepared him very well "spiritually and socially" for college.

After two years working as a consultant with Accenture PLC in Los Angeles, Mecca decided it was time for a new challenge. After returning home to Laurel to be closer to his family during the COVID-19 pandemic,

when remote work was encouraged, he ultimately resigned from his position to launch his own business, Park West Digital LLC, in June 2021.

Interested in having more impact with small business clients and their operations, Mecca helps them organize and scale their operations, including project management, using Airtable, a cloud-based collaboration service. In launching his own business, Mecca is part of a national trend, since in 2021, there were 5.4 million new U.S. businesses registrations, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, compared to 4.4 million in 2020, which was a record at the time.

Recalling his decision to operate his own business and the risks inherent in this undertaking, Mecca remembers reading *The Dream Giver* by Bruce Wilkinson, as facilitated by Mr. David Daniels, then the principal at TA (now chief executive officer of the Bainum Family Foundation), in the Summer of 2010, during an orientation for incoming students. The book is a modern-day parable about Ordinary, who dares to leave the Land of Familiar to pursue his Big Dream.

"I wanted to impact other people," using technology, Mecca said about his decision to leave Accenture. People have more opportunities and chances to make changes in their lives than they think, he says.

As for being self-employed, Mecca is giving his full attention to it, and just as he showed with playing basketball and soccer and studying Mechanical Engineering, his chances for success appear to be well above average. "It's one thing to start a business and quite another to operate one," he said. "I don't like to do things halfway," he said.

# Longtime Social Studies Teacher and Librarian to Retire

Sometimes, being raised in a family that moved a lot can make a person want to establish deeper roots in a particular community.

That's just the experience Ms. Lou Anne Wood had when she moved from Michigan to Maryland 37 years ago and joined the staff at Takoma Academy.

A social studies teacher who also serves as the school librarian, Ms. Wood is retiring from TA in June, capping a 45-year teaching career.

Growing up the daughter of a minister, Ms. Wood lived in 10 states during her upbringing. She grew closer to her siblings amidst such change. As she prepared to finish high school, she wanted to be a librarian and earned her bachelor's degree in History with a minor in Library Science from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Mich., in three years, after starting at Union College, another Adventist institution, located in Lincoln, Neb.

She taught for eighth years at Cedar Lake Academy, now known as Great Lakes Adventist Academy, in Cedar Lake, Mich., initially resisting the opportunity to work there. "I prayed that night that the door would shut," she said about being offered the job to teach, when she saw herself as a librarian. After Ms. Wood was informed that Cedar Lake Academy would pay for her to study during the summer at University of Texas at Austin to receive a master's degree, her mind was made up, and she accepted the job offer, studying for four consecutive summers in Austin, Texas, before earning her Master's in 1980.

Although she had lived in 10 states growing up, the harsh midwestern winters in Michigan took their toll.

"The day I got stuck twice in the snow in one day is the day I decided to



send out my resume," Ms. Wood said. She left the boarding school and was hired by Frank Jones, then a new administrator at TA who had worked at Cedar Lake, to be the TA school librarian for the 1985-1986 school year.

Over time, the mixture of her work involving teaching has increased, inversely proportionate to the school's enrollment declining, just as changes in technology have changed school librarians' jobs, and in recent years, she has taken on a full-time teaching load. At TA, in addition to serving as school librarian and teaching Social Studies, Ms. Wood has taught AP Human Geography, Great Books, African American Studies, and other courses.

"All the wonderful people," is what she will miss about TA. "I love them," she said of the staff, faculty, and students. "The kids can make you grind your teeth," at one moment, she said. "They gladden your heart," in many others.

Over time, Ms. Wood has seen how TA students in recent years have become more "tech savvy." She has also noted that they process information differently during an era when they have many avenues to receive information, such as through their phones and computers, in addition to

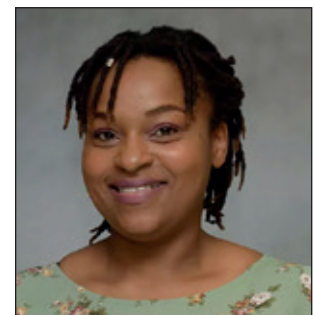
books, magazines, newspapers, and other people.

She especially likes helping students make connections between what has occurred in the past and current affairs, since history tends to repeat itself. For example, during a late March class discussion, one class learned about the Soviet Union's experience with invading and occupying Afghanistan and how their experience was not unlike the United States' fighting the Vietnam War to help South Vietnam prevail in the fight with their northern compatriots.

In addition to being a social studies teacher and librarian, Ms. Wood has for years served as the advisor to the National Honor Society at TA.

In retirement, Ms. Wood plans to move again, moving south from Maryland, as she wants to purchase a multi-family home with her brothers in the "hill country" in a state with relatively low property tax, such as Alabama, Georgia, or Tennessee.

## DID YOU KNOW?



TA's Camerata, under the direction of Fine Arts Teacher Mrs. Lulu Mupfumbu, traveled to Boston in February for the American Chorale Directors Association Conference at St. Cecelia's Parish. Mrs. Mupfumbu has been TA's Fine Arts teacher and choir director since 2009.

**Takoma Academy**  
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**TAKOMA ACADEMY NEWS | VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1 | SPRING 2022**

*Congratulations to the 23 new National Honor Society inductees from our March 31 ceremony. Each student is at least a sophomore with a 3.75 or greater GPA. Students write an essay, produce recommendations, and submit an activity information form to leadership, character, and service for consideration.*



**301-434-4700 | [www.ta.edu](http://www.ta.edu)**

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## Rest in Peace

*Elisa Gropper Linowes '82  
Kurt Reichenbach '71  
Juan Torres, Friend of TA  
Le Roy Wennerberg '63  
Rowland Wilkinson '87*

## Mission Statement

Takoma Academy is a Seventh-day Adventist high school welcoming all races, cultures, and religions; leading young people to Jesus Christ, providing excellence in academics and a commitment to service.

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