

Adams-Friendship Academic Hall of Fame 2024

Jeffrey Cila (1977)

Picture an Adams-Friendship High School senior accepting his diploma at the May 1977 Commencement. In just six months, lyrics from *Free Bird* performed by Lynyrd Skynyrd which peaked on billboard charts in January, would take on a meaning it would be hard for Jeffrey Cila to anticipate.

After enlisting in the Navy, Reverend Cila began training as a Surgical Technologist in Orlando, Florida. This was the beginning of a career journey which took him to California, Maryland, North Carolina, Italy, South Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Nevada. After just eight years of service, he was promoted to Chief Petty Officer and completed an associate degree by attending night school.

During his 22 years of active duty, Reverend Cila was selected for a commissioning program earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1990. He was commissioned as Ensign, Naval Intelligence Officer and attended Aviation Ground School in Pensacola and Navy Marine Intelligence Training in Virginia before joining a squadron. After retirement from the military in 1999, he taught high school in South Carolina for two years. He and his wife were busy raising three children as he returned to college—earning a Bachelor of Science in Information Management in 2002.

In 2002, Reverend Cila was hired by the University of South Carolina School of Medicine as a Systems and Network Manager where he remained for 15 years. In 2012, he completed a Master of Health Information Systems Degree program online through the University of Illinois, Chicago. He spent two years as a volunteer instructor at the University of South Carolina and two semesters as an online associate instructor for the University of Illinois-Chicago College of Applied Professional Sciences (Health Data Management). He continued this phase in his career with the Lexington Medical Center.

Jeffrey Cila's accomplishments have been recognized resulting in numerous accolades. In the past 10 years, civic and religious endeavors have been and are continuing to write the newest chapters of his journey. In 2023, Jeffrey Cila officially became Reverend Jeffrey Cila, a pastor licensed by the United Methodist Church South Carolina Conference. In his words, "I've embarked on a new career that affords me a way of giving back and helping others as the Adams-Friendship School District did for me."

Reverend Cila's daughter said, "My father would be the first to claim he was an average student at Adams-Friendship High School. He instilled the importance of education—a ladder you climb—where you get off is a key determinant of the quality of life you will lead."

Reverend Cila responded to how Adams-Friendship Schools prepared him for life:

“Without question the district schools proved to me that I Can Learn. That knowledge first requires basic understanding of the rudimentary concepts, and principles to apply and build upon year after year. I benefited from the structure of the district in the 1970s; to have elementary, junior high/middle schools, and a central high school campus. Children can be children and young adults can learn and grow socially in their own age-appropriate peer structures.

My educational experience began at Pineland Elementary School after my family moved to the Cottonville area from Hancock; I would be in fourth grade. But I had five brothers and sisters too, all eventually in school together. One of my enduring memories was putting up the American Flag practically every day with my new friend Greg Bakovka in fifth grade. The classrooms were orderly, and we knew the teachers were in charge. I remember to this day my fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Kreigle, putting on my report card, “Jeffrey doesn’t take criticism well.”...she was honest and right; something I needed to work on in the years ahead. It was clear we were there to learn and the teachers to teach so that we might master the content, prepared to move on from grade to grade. Sometimes that only meant moving from one side of the classroom to the other (important just the same). Programs like 4-H and FFA were available (got me raising rabbits to show at the Fair). Also participated in a Soil and Water Conservation speaking program and won – I believe the prize was \$3, big money back then. Mr. Ivan Morrow was so excited to take several of us to a regional speaking contest. It expanded my appreciation for the sustainability of the natural world. My first hunter safety course (age 12) was held at Pineland Elementary. Even recess had purpose whether on playground equipment or organizing ourselves in teams for touch football and softball. Our teachers were there to supervise and provide instruction. We felt connected to the other regional elementary schools as well. The schools were allowed to compete in inter-school team sports like softball, which created some strong and healthy rivalries, but also got students around the district acquainted early on. In time smaller schools’ students ultimately had to move to middle school in Friendship and later to high school; once rivals now became teammates and lifelong friends.

Middle school in Friendship was culturally different from Pineland Elementary School. That was a good thing, I learned to adapt to change. The subjects were harder, the extracurricular activities were more available (sports, art, music, and civic activities). Not just our academic pursuits, but I was able to start music lessons (percussion) in fifth grade with Clark Staehling that lead to being in the band. Recently on the internet the Class of 1977 shared an old poem about our high school band’s grand adventure of fund raising and marching in four Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans (1974). I was a freshman at the time. The whole community and district were so proud to support Angelo LaValle and our marching band. The value of a community working together made a dream come true. We sold and ate a lot of fruit to make that trip happen. I had forgotten the police and fire escort to the county line; going and returning.

High School had many teachers that were demanding, but they also were good at dispensing praise when we students were on task. I was an average student, taking advantage of band, sports, theater, and student government to learn the values of precision, how to treat people, and time management. I recall a group of fellow classmates sharing an early life goal on a trip to Madison. Mine was that one day, I would need their vote when running for public office. Twice I ran for the South Carolina State Representative for my district as the Republican Candidate. Student government motivated me to make good on trying to make

peoples' lives better through public service. Over the years I've tried to keep tabs on Adams-Friendship when my Navy career permitted. From time to time the Navy would send a press release to the local paper to promote one of my career milestones. No doubt my parents, family, and friends liked to see that. The Class of 1977 remains close online and many of us return every five years for a reunion; some of the early ones I helped plan. In 2022, after accepting my pastoral appointment, unable to travel back, I gave the blessing for the meal by Zoom. My classmates appreciated the effort.

Our family was already large when we settled in Cottonville (six children) which meant ever-growing sets of social circles. As I grew older, it became clearer that in many cases our friends' parents had grown up together as well. Back then as children we learned that being interconnected was important. Through our parents and school, friends needed to know they could rely on one another. Then the joys were more spirited, and hardships would touch many. I lost two fellow students in my years in Adams-Friendship, so yes, the school district also helped me to grieve and work through loss. When in my early teens, my parents would divorce, and after a time Mom would marry a man who had five children. When I was a senior in high school one more child was born to tie the new blended family together perhaps. At the age of fourteen I would decrease the extracurricular aspects of school to work in the evenings and summer to take financial pressure off the family. Where, in the schools sweeping out Adams Elementary at the end of the day and in the summer repainting classrooms, scrubbing floors, and general maintenance in the high school. That gave me a glimpse of all the people, not just teachers and administration, that are needed to run a school system so we could just show up and learn. I remember Principal Kolek cutting me a break when I did something wrong; Dale Toltzman who made algebra fun; Mrs. Fredrickson and Emerson Craig whose lessons in typing made promotion in the Navy easier and opened computing as a career field; Angelo LaValle who challenged me to be better not just average; and Myrtle Sauer who drove my bus and carried my brothers and sisters safely to and from school even when we were not very gracious - just to name a few."

In his communication to the A-F Academic Hall of Fame Committee, Reverend Cila commented, *"I am honored to receive this recognition, it is truly meaningful to me. Though my professional life has taken me many places, Adams-Friendship is at the core of my being, the cornerstone of who I have become as a person. I enjoy every chance I get to return to that part of this country. I regard Adams County as my true home in this world."*

In July of 1977, Lynyrd Skynyrd performed in Oakland California. A few phrases from the song *Free Bird* feel poignant when reviewing the accomplishments of Reverend Jeffrey Paul Cila:

*... "If I leave here tomorrow
Would you still remember me?
For I must be traveling on now
'Cause there's too many places I've got to see"...*

Yes, Reverend Cila. You remember Adams-Friendship and Adams-Friendship will remember you.