Mack Wilberg, music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, will be Utah State University Eastern’s 80th graduation speaker on Saturday, April 28, at 10:30 a.m. in the Bunnell-Dmitrich Athletic Center.

Wilberg was appointed music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on March 28, 2008, having served as associate music director of the choir since May 1999. Dr. Wilberg is responsible for all musical and creative aspects of the choir and orchestra at Temple Square in rehearsals, concerts, tours and recordings, as well as the weekly broadcast of “Music and the Spoken Word.”

He is a former professor of music at Brigham Young University and is active as a composer, arranger, guest conductor and clinician throughout the United States and abroad. His compositions and arrangements, published exclusively by Oxford University Press, are performed and recorded by choral organizations throughout the world. He received his bachelor’s degree from BYU and his master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Southern California.

A non-traditional and traditional student represent USU Eastern’s top academic students.

Robert (Rob) Russell McKibben graduated from Emery High School in 1990 and began attending the College of Eastern Utah. He recognized he wasn't ready for college life and stepped-out in pursuit of fulltime employment. After spending several years working in the mining and power industries, McKibben realized he needed to complete his degree and returned USU Eastern in 2015.

As a non-traditional student, McKibben joined the new industrial automation program in 2016. He helped promote this new technology program at festivals and at various STEM events. During his time at USU Eastern, he built several automated systems and enjoyed sharing those projects with students, faculty and the community. After deciding that “hey, getting an associate degree wasn’t all that bad,” McKibben will continue at USU Eastern and work towards a bachelor’s of science degree in technology systems.

Serving as salutatorian is student-athlete, Harlee Sue Willoughby, daughter of John and Portia Willoughby. She graduated from Delta High School in 2016 and accepted a scholarship to play on USU Eastern’s women’s basketball team.

In high school, Willoughby participated in student government, National Honor’s Society, and named academic all-state in both volleyball and basketball. While at USU Eastern, Willoughby served as a point guard and team captain for the women’s basketball team. She was named the Female Athletic Scholar of the year and second team academic all-conference plus wrote sports for “The Eagle” newspaper.

Willoughby loves the outdoors and spending time with family. With completion of her USU Eastern degree, she plans to attend UVU where she hopes to pursue a career in exercise science with a focus on helping children with disabilities. Whether on the court, in the classroom or serving in her community, she will be a champion on change.

Chancellor’s Medallion Recipient

Dr. Danielle Howa Pendergrass, DNP, APRN, WHNP-BC, FAANP is a Carbon County native who returned home to fulfill a lifelong dream of caring for the women in her community. In 2012, she opened Eastern Utah Women’s Health and offers services to over 20,000 underserved women living in Carbon, Emery and Grand Counties.

She was instrumental in changing Utah’s Medicaid policy to allow nurse practitioners to directly bill and be reimbursed by Medicaid at 100 percent of the physician’s rate. By partnering with local, state and federal agencies, Pendergrass ensures that all women have access to affordable healthcare.

Recognized for her work in policy, education and equity, Pendergrass is one of 20 nurses named as a Breakthrough Leader in Nursing by the Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action, a joint initiative of AARP, the AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. As a result, she was recruited as a nurse expert and consultant for the Center to Champion Nursing in America.

She was featured in the AARP magazine and is the recipient of numerous leadership awards. Pendergrass
was honored with the Nurse Practitioner in Women’s Health Inspirations in Policy award and recently served as the Utah State Representative for the American Association of Nurse Practitioners. Recognized as a leader who made outstanding contributions in policy and clinical practice, she was selected as a Fellow of the America Association of Nurse Practitioners. A highly sought after national speaker, community activist and policy maker, she is most proud of the impact she has on the women and girls in her community.

A nurse for over 20 years, Pendergrass earned an associate degree in nursing at CEU Eastern Utah, a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Weber State University and a master’s and doctorate degree in nursing practice from the University of Utah. She was the recipient of the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Graduate Fellowship.

Val J. Halamandaris Award

The Val J. Halamandaris Award recipient is Nichole Bishop, daughter of Paul and Stacie Bishop, a 2015 Westlake High School graduate in Eagle Mountain. While at WHS, she served as president of the school’s Community Service Group. At USU Eastern, Bishop served in the Serving Utah Network (SUN) Center where she participated in planning and promoting service on campus and the surrounding areas. Her service in the local community benefited programs at the Carbon County Food Bank, Carbon Kids for Caring, HOPE summit, Low Income Housing, and many others.

Her desire to serve also reached beyond the communities close to campus with involvement in projects in Navajo Mountain and poverty-stricken areas of Italy. Her caring personality and determination to better the life of those around her touched and changed the life of many. Bishop gave her heart and soul to USU Eastern. She plans to continue her education at USU Eastern and earn a bachelor’s degree in biology to later pursue a career as an optometrist.

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