

Fennelly Society: Creating A Lasting Legacy



“Those who knew him often refer to Edward Joseph Fennelly as one of Riordan High School’s founding fathers, but in truth it would be more accurate to describe him as a man of many firsts.”

Leave your legacy to Riordan through Planned Giving.

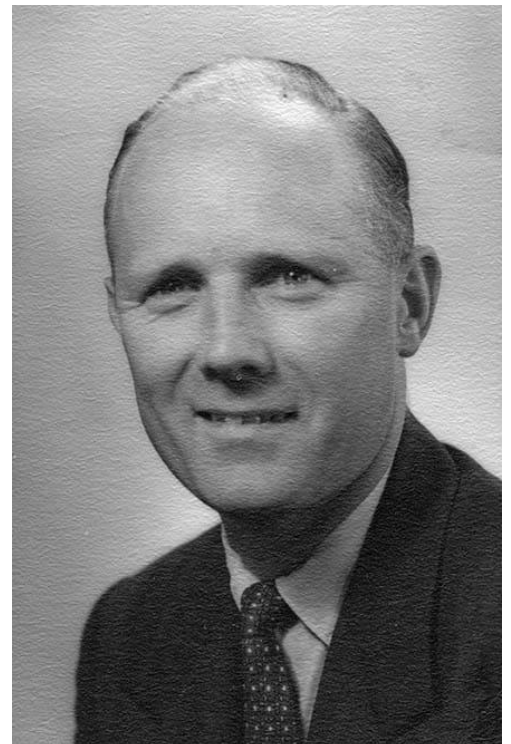
Our alumni and parents know the impact that a Riordan education can have on the life of a student. Your participation in Archbishop Riordan High School’s Fennelly Society will allow you to support the growth and development of the school well into the future.

If you are interested in finding out more information about how to make a planned gift such as a bequest, charitable trust, or a gift of life insurance or retirement funds, please contact Director of Planned Giving Mr. Steve Mullin, smullin@riordanhs.org.

Meet Ed Fennelly

Not only was he among the all-boys catholic high school’s first teachers, he was also its first coach of their football, baseball, basketball and cross country teams. Within a few years, perhaps bored by a lack of activity, he also started the school’s first golf and swimming teams.

Before he was one of Riordan’s most influential leaders, he was a prep basketball star, winning league championships in his junior and senior years at St. Joseph’s in Alameda. Future NBA star Jason Kidd also led St. Joseph’s to league titles, but history will show that Fennelly was Jason Kidd long before Kidd was a kid, though he never mentioned this to his students and athletes.



In keeping with this theme, he also was the first commissioner of the West Catholic Athletic League, a fledgling organization when Fennelly started it in 1967 that blossomed into a powerhouse lineup of schools that produced professional athletes like Milwaukee Bucks center Kevin Restani, San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds and New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady.

It was that kind of vision, organization and dedication that carried Fennelly through his 40 years of service at Riordan. And it is with the same level of loyalty and reverence that his former students and colleagues want to honor him: The school is announcing that they are rededicating their planned giving society in Fennelly's name – another first.

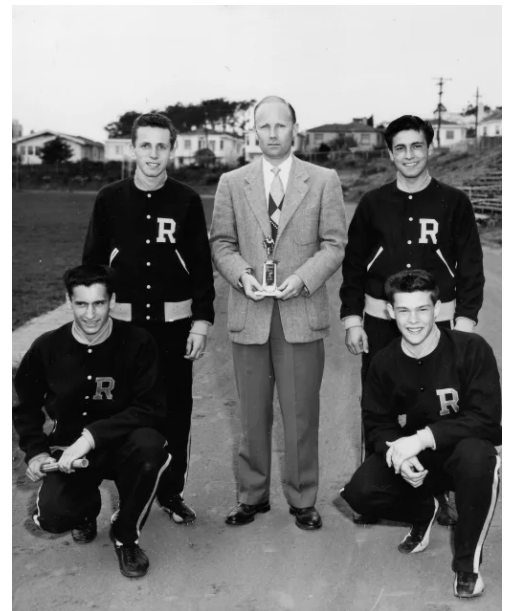
The Fennelly Society

And if anyone could help secure the school's future with a planned gift, it will be those who revere Fennelly's memory, which still inspires the generations of students, teachers and coaches who knew him.

"You could tell he was more than just a teacher and a coach," said retired San Francisco firefighter Jim Ferry '57. "He was just someone you were really lucky to have in your life. He was very thoughtful, considerate and fair."

How much of an impact did Fennelly have on his former student? Each time Ferry donates to the school, he makes sure to do so in Fennelly's name. "He was just a fabulous person and I believe he deserves all the recognition he could get for what he did for Riordan and all the kids he came into contact with," Ferry said.

That mirrors the sentiment of another of Fennelly's first group of students. Contractor Sergio Nibbi '54, said he couldn't imagine "a nicer guy" to have his name on the new donor society. "He was just a very giving person, you couldn't find a more kind man," said Nibbi. But not so kind as to forget who was in charge in the classroom. "I never saw anybody who could throw an eraser across the room with more pinpoint accuracy."



“He was a tough guy, very old school,” said Ron Isola ‘61, Riordan’s legendary basketball coach, whose teams won nearly 350 games and numerous WCAL, Central Coast Section and state titles.

“But he was one of those people who inspired others to go into teaching and coaching. He’s one of the people who helped make the place great.”

Yet as with anyone who enjoys such a long career in one organization, not everyone was pleased all the time. Legend has it that one of the Marianist brothers who taught at Riordan got upset with Fennelly for some perceived slight. Isola said that Bro. Miller proposed a trade at the time – Fennelly for a highly sought-after Marin Catholic High School football coach.

Those in sports know some of the best trades are the ones that don’t happen. If Fennelly had gone, Riordan wouldn’t have hired Rudy Zannini, a former St. Ignatius basketball star who would go on to play with the great Bill Russell and K.C. Jones at the University of San Francisco when the team won back-to-back NCAA titles.

Dedicated Talent Scout

As athletic director, Fennelly appointed Zannini as varsity coach in 1961, whose Restani-led Riordan teams would later win consecutive WCAL crowns. Zannini himself subsequently became the school’s athletic director.

“I owe a lot of my career there due to Ed as do so many others,” Zannini said. “He was a great teacher and a great leader and he was responsible for so much of the history of the school and the WCAL. That’s why we’re happy to give back to the school. He deserves a lot of credit.”



His passing in 2009 more recently spurred the idea of rebooting and rebranding the Riordan Heritage Society by associating it with someone who helped lay the foundation

for the school in its early days. When school officials discussed it with prominent alumni, it was nearly unanimous that only one person crossed enough generations and inspired the idea of giving back – Ed Fennelly.

“He was a truly wonderful, talented and devoted man, well deserving of the honor,” said Dr. Bob Branick '53.

Securing Riordan's Future

Clearly others felt the same way, since his spirit and dedication loomed over two generations of impressionable young men.

“He was such a presence for 40 years here,” said Jeff Holl '72, a long-time trustee and head of the board's development committee. “He had such a great heart and he gave so much to the school. So people at the school just thought, ‘Let's do right by this guy.’”

The timing couldn't be better. As Riordan continues to provide financial aid to 61% of its student body while also improving its facilities, the need for planned gifts has become increasingly apparent.



That's a fitting legacy for Ed Fennelly, since he always put his students, the athletic community and his school first.

A version of this article appeared in the Winter 2018 edition of Future Magazine. Ken Garcia is a freelance writer and former columnist for The Examiner and San Francisco Chronicle.