



The History of W.J. Keenan High School

In 1960, there was a small forest along what is now Pine Belt Drive. Rumor has it that two youngsters accidentally set fire to the forest, clearing very large acre of land. Someone suggested building a school on this newly cleared land, and W. J. Keenan Junior High School was thereby conceived. Its doors were opened in 1963, joining Crayton Junior High School as a feeder school to A. C. Flora High School.

William J. Keenan, for whom the school is named, was known as a humanitarian, who served on the Columbia Public School Board from 1934-1959. A native of Columbia, Mr. Keenan was chairman of the board of Keenan Oil Company.

At the time, W. J. Keenan was the most modern school building in South Carolina. It consisted of the office drawing room, and it had the distinction of being the first air-conditioned school in South Carolina! In 1969, the gymnasium, shop, and 300 building classrooms were added. Also, 1969-70 became the last school year Keenan was to remain a junior high school. The 1970-71 school year saw Keenan become the area's ninth high school. The library, more classrooms, a health room, and new cafeteria were added. Keenan became the first completely integrated high school in Columbia. Through the new zoning lines drawn as Richland County School District followed the courts' ruling to desegregate. Keenan High received students from A. C. Flora and C.A. Johnson High School through the enactment of the new zoning boundaries brought about by the desegregation of Richland County School District One.

Keenan was built to educate about 900 pupils, but it opened as a high school in 1970 with grades nine, ten and eleven, comprising a student body of 1200 students! Every classroom was overloaded, and space became a real problem. Ten portable classrooms were brought in, and classes were held in the gym until spare rooms could be found. A comprehensive high school was established in the fall of 1971 with grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. Keenan ended this first year with an enrollment of approximately 1450 students.

Other additions were completed in the spring of 1973, including the athletic complex, band department, teachers' cafeteria and lounge, 500 building classrooms and media center, business education and graphic-communication wing. The old library became what is not the main office and guidance complex with the student affairs office moving into the old office area. Since Keenan was now a high school, a new mascot was chosen, the "Raider," blue and gold were selected as the high school's colors.

Improvements of physical facilities continued. A new, fully lighted student parking lot, bus parking lot, three athletic fields, baseball diamond, three tennis courts, and outside baseball courts were all completed in 1973.

W. J. Keenan received membership in the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges and was re-evaluated by this association in the spring of 1978, again receiving full privileges and scholastic recognition, a membership that has continued through the years to the present. Keenan is also a member of the South Carolina High School League's AA Athletic Conference.

During the summer of 1976, extensive remodeling brought upgrades in the home economics, food careers, office occupation, distributive education, fashion merchandising, art, graphics, and industrial arts teaching areas. These changes greatly enhanced the instructional process with these classrooms; both students and teachers benefited from better utilization of space and facilities.

Renovations of four science lecture and lab areas and two social studies classrooms began during the 1982-83 school year and were completed at a cost of over \$300,000. Construction on the new 500 seat theatre began in June 1982, and was ready for student, community, and district use in November 1983. Keenan was proud of its new theatre and enjoyed many educational and cultural events that were brought to our community.

In 2004 our Keenan community and other district voters passed a school referendum that would finance the construction of two new high schools in Richland One, W. J. Keenan High School and Dreher High School. Plans called for the renovation of the former Keenan into a middle school which would be occupied by W. G. Sanders Middle when renovations were complete.

Finally, during the summer of 2007, our new state of the art high school was complete. Administrators and staff began the move to the new building in preparation to welcome excited students on August 10, 2007. W. J. Keenan High School has come a long way since 1960 from the little patch of forest off Pine Belt Road. We are now located in a facility at 361 Pisgah Church Road that is architecturally pleasing and majestic.

W. J. Keenan High School will continue to grow and thrive although the faces of our students and teachers will change. Our duty is to pass on the Keenan spirit, guiding our students to grow, to learn, and to reach for the prize!