FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ARCHBISHOP RIORDAN HIGH SCHOOL

SUMMER 2026

Celebrating the Past While Crafting the

FUTURE

magazine



RIORDAN'S OWN WORLD CUP

THE BOARDING PROGRAM CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Timothy A. Reardon,
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Dear Crusader Family,

Every August, parents from around the world do something extraordinary. They place their children on airplanes bound for San Francisco and entrust them to people they barely know.

As a parent, I can think of few greater acts of faith.

This year, Archbishop Riordan High School celebrates fifteen years of boarding. Over that time, hundreds of students have traveled thousands of miles from home to become part of our community. They have enriched our classrooms, strengthened our teams, broadened our perspectives, and helped make Riordan a truly global school.

As I read the stories in this issue, however, I found myself thinking about their parents.

The boarding program begins with trust. Parents trust our boarding team to provide guidance and support. They trust our teachers to challenge their children academically. They trust our coaches, counselors, Resident Advisors, and staff to help shape the character and values that will guide them long after they leave Riordan.

That trust is both humbling and inspiring.

In the Marianist tradition, we speak often about educating in the family spirit. The boarding program may be the clearest expression of that ideal. Students arrive from different countries and cultures, but before long they become part of the fabric of Riordan. The stories in this issue remind us that while students may come from every corner of the globe, they all become members of the same family.

To the families who have entrusted us with their children over the last fifteen years, thank you. It has been one of the great privileges in our school's history, and we are honored to be part of your journey.

With gratitude,

Tim Reardon
PRESIDENT
Archbishop Riordan High School

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Photo by Rachel Gerke '27 of The Crusader

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Mission Statement

Founded in 1949, Archbishop Riordan High School—an Archdiocesan Catholic High School in the Ingleside Neighborhood of San Francisco, California—prepares young men and women for leadership and lifelong success by providing education imbued with Catholic Marianist values of faith, community, inclusivity, service and justice through its rigorous college preparatory curriculum, house system and co-curricular activities.

BOARDING SCHOOL PROGRAM

A Longtime Fixture of the Boarding School, Andrew Hilman Leaves His Mark on Riordan

When school starts back up this fall and students return to campus, Riordan will once again be abuzz with activity and energy. There will be the usual assortment of classes, sports competitions, performing arts showcases and all the other great events that mark the school year.

There will be one noticeable absence, however. For the first time since 2021, Andrew Hilman will not be around. One the greatest basketball players in school history, Hilman has been a campus mainstay for all four years at Riordan, living in the student dorms while pursuing his academic and athletic goals.

It will truly be the end of an era, but Hilman said he will savor his time at Riordan for the rest of his life.

"I couldn't wish for anything better," said Hilman, a native of the African nation of Cameroon. "The dorm program has given me so much opportunity. It's changed my life."

A four-year starter for the boys basketball team, Hilman helped the squad rewrite the school record books. Over his memorable career, Hilman led the Crusaders to 105 wins, helping the team capture three straight Central Coast Section championships and the Northern California Open Division title, the first in school history. He finished his career winning an unheard of 58 straight WCAL regular season games. Among those wins was a 53-51 victory over archrival St. Ignatius, in which Hilman sank a highly contested jumper at the buzzer to win in front of 4,000 fans at the University of San Francisco's Sobrato Center.

> "I couldn't wish for anything better. The dorm program has given me so much opportunity. It's changed my life."
>
> **Andrew Hilman '26**

It wasn't always easy for Hilman, however. When he arrived on campus as a 14-year-old freshman, he could barely speak English, having grown up in French-speaking Cameroon. He initially struggled to keep up in class as he adjusted to a new life thousands of miles from his home.

"I remember coming home to my dorm room and just crying," said Hilman. "It was really hard learning subjects in a language I had never spoken before."

But just like on the basketball court, Hilman dedicated himself to becoming a better student. He stayed in class after hours to meet with teachers, determined to immerse himself in his studies.

He has since emerged as an ideal student, earning top grades over his tenure at Riordan. And despite being a star athlete, Hilman has remained an approachable, accessible presence on campus.

"I was never interested in being that 'cool' guy," said Hilman. "I've always wanted to help others out, because so many people in this community have helped me. That's what being part of Riordan has taught me."



Andrew Hilman, originally from Cameroon, was a four-year starter for the boys basketball team and finished his Riordan career with 58 straight WCAL regular season game wins.

That commitment to community is exemplified by Hilman's ever growing language skills. As part of his experience in the dorms, Hilman dedicated himself to learning the languages of his fellow boarders. Hilman estimates that he can say hello in about 20 different languages now—a far cry from those early days when he was stymied by English.

"It was really important for me to connect with the other students," said Hilman. "Even if I could only say a few words, it was important for me to try."

For everyone who's been in Hilman's orbit over the past four years, his absence from campus will surely be a big hole. Thankfully, however, he won't be going too far next year. After a heated recruiting battle, Hilman accepted a basketball scholarship to play at USF next season. He'll be just down the road from Riordan, and he said he'll come back to visit the school whenever he has a chance.

"Riordan is like my family at this point," said Hilman. "I'll be part of this community forever."



Ema Brkic, who grew up in Zagreb, Coatia, will continue her educational journey here in the states by enrolling in St. Thomas Aquinas college in New York on a soccer scholarship.

Ema Brkic and Malik Steinkamp Represent the Boarding Program's Growing Global Presence

When Riordan senior Ema Brkic '26, who grew up in Zagreb, Croatia, talks about her first couple of weeks on campus, her eyes light up and broad, beaming smile immediately appears upon her face.

"I was seriously too excited to think at first," said Brkic. "My heart was beating so fast for those first few days because I was happy to be here. I think it's the absolute best way to experience America—through a boarding school program. Everyone here made me feel so welcome and so at home. It was an amazing experience."

Brkic, a club soccer player in her home country, first heard about Riordan through other athletes she met from Bosnia and Serbia, who urged her to explore America as a schooling option. After a standout year on the soccer pitch at Riordan, she'll continue her educational journey here in the states by enrolling in St. Thomas Aquinas college in New York on a soccer scholarship.

As Riordan's boarding program celebrates 15 years, experiences like Brkic's are becoming more common, with the school branching out to include increasingly more European students. In the early years, the boarding students were primarily from Asia, but now Riordan boasts students from 22 different countries and five continents.

Malik Steinkamp '27, a junior from Frankfurt, Germany, is another example of the ongoing growth and evolution of the boarding school. Steinkamp was inspired to visit Riordan after his sister attended private school in upstate New York.



Malik Steinkamp was drawn to Riordan and San Francisco because the diversity and international feel of the city reminded him of his home in Frankfurt, Germany.

"She really enjoyed her time, but she was kind of out in the country and far away from everything and I really wanted to live in a city like Frankfurt," said Steinkamp. "And San Francisco really reminded me of home. It had the same diversity, the same kind of international feeling. And being in the boarding program made the transition very easy—definitely easier than I expected."

Both Brkic and Steinkamp have been able to explore the City during their tenure at Riordan, with the students citing Baker Beach, Ocean Beach and Golden Gate Bridge as some of their favorite attractions.

That unique quality of the Riordan international experience—a school that offers boarding opportunities in an urban, metropolitan setting, is part of what makes the program so special. Not only are the students interacting with others from around the globe, they're also making a lifetime connection with San Francisco and the Riordan families who call this place home.

While Brkic said she immediately connected with her other boarding student peers, she quickly became close to local students as well. "I share a closeness with the international students because we all came here for the same thing—to get the most out of this experience," said Brkic. "So there will always be that. But I honestly can say that my closest friends now are mostly students from San Francisco."

Brkic said most of the bonds were formed during her season playing soccer, where she met many of her closest friends. Steinkamp said he's made numerous connections not only at Riordan, but outside the school as well.

"I actually was walking downtown one time and I heard some kids speaking German," said Steinkamp, who is still determining what his educational experience will look like next year. "And I randomly started talking with them and found out that one of them grew up like 30 minutes away from me in Frankfurt. So, I've also made friends that way as well."

Steinkamp's boarding school roommate grew up in Italy, and he said he plans to visit him there this summer, another example of Riordan expanding his horizons and experiences. Both Steinkamp and Brkic had the same exact advice for students curious about coming to America for their high school education: do it.

"I would say just take the risk—it's worth it, believe me," said Brkic. "You will never experience a community like the one we have here in Riordan. This is a special place."

Twins Christine and Jessica Nguyen find community, culture & themselves in the boarding program

"Sour cream with dumplings?"

That's what Jessica Nguyen '27 thought to herself, incredulously, when her German-Russian friend gestured for her to dip. She didn't know it at the time, but Jessica was about to taste her first pierogi—the potato-filled Polish dumplings most often seen in Eastern Europe or Pittsburgh Pirates games. But even in the dorm kitchen—where students from more than 20 countries share favorite dishes from back home and experiment with new ones, to varying degrees of success (Christine, Jessica's twin sister, recalled struggling to cook calamari and a time when 20 students toiled together to not burn their pancakes)—seeing a dumpling that wouldn't look out of place on a dim sum table smothered in sour cream was a truly foreign experience for her.

But when Jessica ate one? It was fantastic—everyone in the kitchen wanted one too. In fact, so many people tried the dumplings that Jessica's friend nearly lost her entire dinner. Therein lies the golden rule of the dorm kitchen: Always bring a fork, and if you're cooking, always make enough to share.

Eye-opening experiences are nothing new for Christine '27 and Jessica, juniors at Archbishop Riordan, since they arrived from Vietnam to enroll in the boarding program. The opportunities they've had to connect with other cultures, from the clubs and on-campus organizations to the aforementioned kitchen hijinks, while enjoying the classic American high school experience have made their time at Riordan invaluable and unforgettable.



Twins Jessica and Christine Nguyen, above, relished the opportunity to find their independence at Riordan.

"It's very diverse, and it teaches you a lot," Christine said of the boarding program and the student community. "It teaches you, it protects you and it shows you the world."

Having a twin sister to share the experience with helps too, but both Christine and Jessica stressed that they are not tied at the hip. In fact, both credit the Riordan experience with helping them express their individuality and chart their own paths. Growing up, their identities felt so intertwined that peers would "merge" them together, and it was difficult for each twin to explore their own independent interests. Jessica used soccer as an example—she liked playing because she could be teammates with Christine, but when she got to Riordan, away from a lifetime of shared expectations, she began to enjoy cooking, studying, hiking and volleyball more.

> "[The Riordan experience] teaches us we can still be sisters, we can still be twins, but we will just have our own identity."
>
> **Jessica Nguyen '27**



While Juniors Christine and Jessica, above, are excited about their futures, they'll miss and cherish their Riordan community forever.

"The community around me recognizes me as my own," Christine said, which Jessica echoed:

"[The Riordan experience] teaches us we can still be sisters, we can still be twins, but we will just have our own identity."

Their relationship has evolved, but remains just as strong. Jessica says they've learned that supporting each other doesn't mean they have to be with each other all the time. They are happy to pursue their own interests and goals, knowing that even from afar, they always have each other's backs.

As for what's next? Both Christine and Jessica are rising seniors, and came to Riordan interested in medicine—Christine in nursing, Jessica in pharmaceuticals. Christine still plans to study nursing and sports medicine, and hopes to move to the east coast to pursue an undergraduate degree. She likes the idea of studying in Boston—her time at Riordan has inspired her to continue her American adventure (we hope she's prepared for the weather!). Jessica is still interested in the medical field, and even spoke about becoming a doctor, but the Riordan experience has illuminated so many possibilities for her: On some days she sees a future in robotics, others she considers being a biology or chemistry teacher and she's even found a knack for business and trading stocks.

It goes to show that the Riordan boarding program provides students enriching experiences to expand their horizons as well as the independence to find themselves. And whatever comes next for Christine, Jessica and all their classmates, they'll be confident and ready for the challenges ahead.

"This school will have a special place in your heart," Christine told us. "It will force you to grow as a person, but it will also be there to nurture you."

"You're the top priority in your own world," Jessica said, "and Riordan shows you that."

Interview with Riiny Giir ’20, Riordan Boarding School Alumnus

A native of South Sudan, Riiny Giir is a 2020 graduate of Riordan, having spent two years living on campus as part of the school’s boarding program. Future Magazine connected with Giir to speak about his experiences in the boarding program, how the school helped prepare him for life after Riordan, and about returning to San Francisco to begin his professional career.



Giir played basketball and majored in computer science at Franklin and Marshall College after graduating from Riordan.

When did you arrive at school? When did you graduate?

I arrived at school in 2018 and graduated in 2020. Those were some of the best years—Chan [Ngot ’20] and I came together, both pretty far from home, and we left with a real sense of who we were becoming.

Had you ever visited the country before enrolling at Riordan?

No, I hadn’t. Coming to San Francisco was my first time in the United States. Everything was new—the city, the culture, the school system. It was a lot to take in all at once, but I think that freshness made me pay attention to everything around me in a way I might not have otherwise.

What was the transition like from your home in South Sudan to living in San Francisco?

There’s actually a piece written about the earlier part of my journey if anyone wants the fuller picture. By the time I got to San Francisco, I had already lived through one major uprooting, so I approached it with curiosity more than fear. San Francisco is loud and fast and visually overwhelming compared to what I was used to. The hardest part honestly was the small stuff—the food, the pace, the way people interact. The bigger things I had already made peace with.

How did the boarding school program teachers help make that transition easier for you?

When I arrived at the school, it was all boys and Riordan has this thing called the Brotherhood. You feel it from the moment you step on campus—it’s not just a slogan, it’s genuinely the culture of the place. Mr. [David] Lin ’99, who ran the boarding program, really embodied that. He made sure the environment felt structured but also warm, and that made a real difference when everything else around you is unfamiliar. The staff in the boarding section generally had that same energy—they were present in a way that mattered. And having Chan going through it alongside me helped too. I also came from a coed school back home, so the all-boys environment was its own adjustment. My senior year Riordan actually went coed after Mercy closed down—being there for that transition felt like being part of something historic.



When Giir enrolled on campus, it was his first time stepping foot in the United States.

What was it like attending school with students from countries all over the world?

It was one of the best parts of the experience. Through the boarding program I got close with other international students—Mor Seck, Jordan Noeku, Filip Brazdil— and those friendships came naturally because we were all navigating something similar. We were all away from home, figuring it out, and that created a real bond. Chan was in the program too, so there was already a sense of familiarity to anchor to while we built those new relationships. It also just made for genuinely interesting conversations—you’re constantly learning something about somewhere else, and that broadens how you see the world in a way that’s hard to get any other way.

How did playing basketball help introduce you to other students at the school?

Basketball is a universal language in a lot of ways. You don’t need much of a shared background to connect on the court—you just play, and things develop from there. Coach Joey [Curtin ’01] was great in that sense too—he created an environment where you felt part of something bigger than just the game, and that naturally extended into how you connected with teammates and the broader school community. Some of my closest friendships at Riordan came from outside of basketball though, through the boarding program.

What was the most valuable experience you gained from going to Riordan?

Learning to be comfortable in discomfort. I came into an environment that was unfamiliar in almost every way and had to figure out how to show up fully anyway—in the classroom, on the court, in the dorms. That’s a skill that has served me in everything since. It’s not something you can be taught directly; you have to live through it. Riordan gave me the environment to do that, and the people around me—Mr. Lin, Coach Joey, Coach Danny [Curtin ’08], Coach Andrew [Colville] Coach Matt [Fochtman], and the teachers (Ms. Mary Dalton, Mr. Armando Castillo, Ms. Kim Loder, Mrs. Ottilie Valverde, Mr. Ray Dominguez)—made it feel worth showing up for.

What are some of your best memories of going to Riordan?

Honestly, a lot of it was the quiet everyday stuff—hanging out with Chan, late nights with the guys in the boarding program, casually bumping into the janitors and trying to communicate in Spanish, the conversations that happened in between everything else. Those are the moments I carry with me. The CCS championship our senior year was fun, but it’s the time spent with people I genuinely liked being around that sticks.



Giir, right, with teammate Chan Ngot '20, at Riordan during basketball practice his junior year.

INTERVIEW *cont'd*

The year Riordan went co-ed was also memorable in its own way—it was a big shift for the school's identity, and being there for that felt like being part of something historic.

Did you attend college? If so, where?

Yes—I went to Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I played basketball and majored in Computer Science with a minor in Studio Art. It was a great experience academically, and the combination of those two fields—technical and creative—really shaped how I think about problems now.

What are you doing now? Are you still living in San Francisco? Do you ever come back to visit the school?

I'm back in San Francisco, which feels fitting—it's where this chapter of my life started. I'm working as an AI Associate at a company called Crossbeam, which helps businesses grow by connecting them with their partner networks. It's a great intersection of the technical and strategic thinking I was building toward at F&M. During my college years I'd make a point of visiting Riordan whenever I came back to San Francisco—it's always good to reconnect with that community. The Brotherhood doesn't really end when you graduate. I've also been to the recent basketball home games including the season's final game against Salesian where we unfortunately lost in the state semifinals.

Do you have any advice for international students interested in attending Riordan?

I would say just give yourself permission to not have it all figured out right away. You're going to be in an unfamiliar place, far from everything familiar, and that's genuinely hard—but it's also where a lot of growth happens. Stay curious about the people around you, take your studies seriously, and don't let the distance from home make you feel like you don't belong, because you do. The Brotherhood and Sisterhood is real—lean into it. The opportunity is real, too. Make the most of it and make an effort to explore the city.

Riordan Alum, Huy Troung '23, Credits Boarding School Leaders for His Personal Growth

Steve Jobs at Apple, Bill Gates at Microsoft and Warren Buffet at Berkshire Hathaway. Three legendary business leaders that built their companies from the ground up, and have served as the bedrock of their businesses' sustained success.

At the Riordan boarding school, those foundational figures are Director of Boarding David Lin '99 and Associate Director of Residential Life Joe Kopp, according to Huy Truong '23.

"Mr. Lin and Mr. Joe really care for their students," said Truong, a boarding school graduate now pursuing computer science at George Mason University.

When Truong first enrolled at Riordan from Vietnam, the boarding program had just 30 students. Now, the school houses nearly 90 students from all over the world, its growth due in no small part to Lin and Kopp's care. Truong spoke glowingly of their hard work building the boarding school community.

Troung said that Lin deeply inspired him and his classmates to be the best versions of themselves. Truong even shared an Instagram account dedicated to Lin that he created with his Vietnamese friends at Riordan, where they chronicled the group's adventures in San Francisco and beyond—the handle in Vietnamese roughly translated to "Mr. Lin's Children."

"Mr. Lin was like our father," Truong said.

He also relayed a story where Kopp—also known as "Coach Kopp" to many students—went to great lengths to retrieve a student's lost phone, to show how his presence made the students feel deeply cared for. Truong even pointed to small things, like when Kopp asked the students for feedback on their dining options. After an entire year of Taco Tuesdays and Jollibee Thursdays, Truong and his classmates were a little sick of the same food every week, and Kopp listened to their wishes—the next year, there was far more variety to the weekly menu.

Truong said that Lin often encouraged him to show new students around Riordan to make sure they felt at home.

"Because they're new, they need someone to guide them around the place for the first time," Truong said. "It's all of our first times studying abroad, away from our families. And we need to have something to rely on when things don't go well."



Truong saw the boarding program's expansion firsthand, crediting Lin and Kopp's stewardship for its growth.

Several years and many students later, the impacts of those conversations—guiding new students into their place in the Riordan community—have compounded. The community has grown closer than ever before, and the boarding program now has a strong foundation on which it will continue to build. Truong often looks back fondly on the program, and even though he's 3,000 miles away, he still feels deeply connected to Riordan, Mr. Lin, Mr. Joe and the memories he made along the way.

"Kids were crazy, yes, but they love each other," Truong said. "That's what I love about Riordan."

After knee injuries complicated her plans, Sara Mazzocchi found her ‘peace’ in the Riordan community

As Sara Mazzocchi prepared for her exchange semester at the Riordan boarding school program, her plan was clear: Study abroad and play volleyball.

It’s a plan that first came into motion nine years ago, when her brother left their home in northern Italy for his exchange year in Australia. Sara always knew she wanted the same international experience, and as she grew older, high school volleyball became central to her vision of the future.

“Volleyball was everything,” Sara told us. “I don’t remember one day without playing volleyball.”

The uniquely-American system of high school sports seemed so refreshing compared to the club-based youth sports of Italy, where school was singularly-focused on academics. Sara was so excited for that integrated aspect of the American high school experience. She spoke wistfully about the chance to play on Senior Night for her school team, imagining her friends and teachers showing up to cheer her on.

“But God had other plans.”

In October 2024, Sara tore her ACL, joining elite athletes like Tom Brady, Alex Morgan and Derrick Rose in having suffered the knee ligament injury. This was a setback, but with her exchange semester beginning in August 2025, she had plenty of time to recover. In January 2025, Sara was cleared to resume practicing, and she planned to finish her club season in Italy before beginning her American high school volleyball career.



Mazzocchi, right, credits the Riordan community for lifting her spirits after two severe knee injuries.

Then, in March 2025, Sara tore her ACL a second time. This time, she needed surgery, and spent the entire summer rehabilitating her injury. By the time she enrolled at Riordan, her pain had not subsided, and high school volleyball was no longer in the cards.

But it was her newfound Riordan community that helped pick her up. P.E. teacher Ryan Jones ’09, himself a former college athlete who dealt with injuries, helped Sara continue her rehabilitation when she arrived on campus. Sara’s history teacher, Brian Morgan, made sure boarding school students felt welcomed in his class, and she loved the class in part due to his kindness and understanding. And Sara has met classmates from all over the world—she is so excited about her upcoming birthday trip to the Italian seaside with the friends she’s met through the boarding program.

“They’re family,” Sara said of the friends she’s made, “so they will stay for the rest of my life.”



Mazzochi, right, enjoying a picnic in the sun with a friend.

> “I tore my ACL and I felt super heavy, like something was wrong inside me. Instead, coming here I found my peace. I’m calm, I’m happy, I really can be myself.”
>
> **Sara Mazzocchi ’26**

After only a few weeks on campus, Sara loved the Riordan community so much that she couldn’t bear to leave in four months at the end of the semester. So, after talking to David Lin ’99, Director of Boarding, and some back and forth with her parents, Sara decided to stay the full year.

And what a year it was! From living in the dorms with 88 other boarding students, Halloween at Six Flags, the Riordan Kairos retreat and even a big American dinner on Super Bowl Sunday, Sara made lasting memories both inside and outside the classroom. Through it all, she said Lin, Joe Kopp, Associate Director of Residential Life, and the other boarding school staff members helped provide students the support system they needed being so far away from family.

“They’re like our parents here,” Sara said.
Now that it’s summer again, and Sara finished up her year at Riordan, she calls her time here “the most beautiful experience I have ever had.” And although Sara still gets emotional discussing the injury, the joy and the support she felt being a part of the boarding school community helped her feel whole again.

“I tore my ACL and I felt super heavy, like something was wrong inside me,” she said. “Instead, coming here I found my peace. I’m calm, I’m happy, I really can be myself.”

Nick Li's Unique Background Positioned Him to Connect Fellow Boarding Students with the Riordan Community

Riordan boarding school students hail from all over the world: Germany, Vietnam, Italy and... Millbrae?

Nick Li '25 understands the confusion—he may have been the only boarding school student within BARTable distance, but he had his reasons. Li had lived with his grandmother in Millbrae since he was 10, and asking her to drive him to Riordan for 7 a.m. basketball practice (and pick him up after 6 p.m. for cross country and track) was just too much for a 70-year-old. So, the boarding program was for Li, who now had the chance to devote time to his studies, extracurriculars and his jumpshot.

Li wasn't always a local, though. Born in China, he spent the first decade of his life with his parents there, and most of his family is still an ocean away. At the young age of 20, he has experienced life on two continents, including both the west and east coasts of America—Li currently studies at the University of Virginia.

At Riordan, Li became friends with both American and International students alike, and since he was still in the Bay, he could hang out with his local friends, too.

"I actually communicate with both groups really well," Li said. "I'm a really outgoing person—I love making friends. I talk a lot. During the day, I'll be hanging out with my local friends. I'd be hanging out with the people living in the dorm."

It's no surprise that Li was a bridge of sorts, especially for the other Chinese students in the boarding program. As a member of the Riordan J.V. basketball team, Li told us that his Chinese friends would often ask him how he was able to make the team. At one point, he even helped one of his Chinese friends train ahead of tryouts. For two weeks, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., Li trained his friend, helping him develop the skills coaches were looking for, especially on the defensive side of the ball. And lo and behold, his friend made the team.

Li recounted teaching his Chinese friends how to "dap someone up" as a greeting. But Li reiterates that while he tried to help his friends feel more comfortable among Americans, talking to other people isn't complex, and that connection can be universal.



Li celebrating his graduation from Riordan in 2025.

"They think, oh, in order to talk to someone, in order to talk to an American, it is complicated. We think differently," Li said. "No, not at all. We're all human. We all think the same way."

At the University of Virginia, Li says that even though he knew no one when he first arrived on campus, his social skills (and basketball talents) helped him make new friends in class, at the dining hall, in the gym and on the court.

"I get the same questions from the college international kids," Li said. "How do you know all these people?"

The answer? Li's ability to connect with others, born out of circumstance and honed at the Riordan boarding program: a skill that will serve him well wherever he goes next. Currently studying kinesiology, Li hopes to become an elite athletic trainer, where he can help athletes maximize their performance and reach new heights.

Riordan Teacher Cory Nelson Understands the Importance of Leading with Empathy

It takes a special kind of educator to work in a school that has students speaking more than 20 different languages. As Riordan's boarding school program has grown, so too has the array of dialects spoken every day on campus, but English remains the one universal tool of communication.

The global makeup of the school requires extra patience and understanding, as educators seek to impart their curricula to members of the student body still catching up to the fundamentals of English.

Helping to handle that transition has been the focal point of Riordan social studies teacher Cory Nelson, who brings a unique skillset to his job. Nelson has a master's degree in teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), which allows him to impart his experiences to his contemporaries.

When Nelson first arrived on campus in 2017, he was co-teaching an English immersion class, and that experience inspired him to create a study hall of sorts with other educators. The goal was to provide insight and feedback about effectively reaching students who might struggle to understand English at times.

"It was really important for teachers to understand the perspective of the student and what it's like to learn a different subject from a new language," said Nelson. "Being able to switch to that perspective allowed the teachers to inject a little more empathy and understanding into their classrooms. And that extra understanding is the key to making a student more successful."

Nelson helped lead those conversations as part of Riordan's Professional Learning Communities—small, teacher-led groups aimed at staff growth and development. He also met one-on-one with teachers to share best practices and other

> "It was really important for teachers to understand the perspective of the student and what it's like to learn a different subject from a new language."
>
> **Cory Nelson, Social Studies Teacher**

helpful tips, such as reminding educators that boarding school students are not just grappling with a new language—they're also adjusting to life on their own for the first time, without their family nearby. That additional viewpoint can be very helpful for catering teacher's approaches, he said.

Over the years, Nelson's TESOL undertaking has evolved and adapted, but the goal is still the same—to show that every teacher at Riordan is committed to supporting the entire student body.

Nelson acknowledged that being a teacher is already a difficult job, and adding in elements of different language levels only makes that endeavor more complex. That is why Nelson praised his fellow teachers for committing themselves to this effort.

"It's so important to have the buy-in from the teachers," said Nelson. "There are always going to be concerns about new changes at the school. But we have such a fantastic community of teachers here—their willingness to take on this challenge is pretty inspiring."

As a teacher with multiple boarding students in his classes—Nelson leads a freshman history course and an AP history course—he puts his words into practice every day. For him, the payoff of that additional responsibility is clearly evident.

"When you have a school with international students, you create an environment of diversity and curiosity," said Nelson. "If you're lab partners with a student from Cameroon you're going to want to ask them questions about Cameroon. You develop a connection and understanding to the places where these students are from. Not only does that give students an appreciation for the background of our boarding students, but it sets up these lifelong connections. We are making these connections to places all over the world and ultimately that's a great learning experience for our local kids."

Parents Put Faith In Riordan While Their Children Succeed Thousands of Miles from Home



Riordan student Sofia Bartkowiak, second from right, on vacation in the Bay Area with her family.

Attending school thousands of miles away from your home is never easy. Many students are living on their own for the first time while learning new languages, cultures and customs.

Yet despite all those challenges, that remote education setup may be even more difficult for the parents of such students. They're being asked to see their teenagers off to a foreign land, trusting that their children will be able to maintain good grades, stay safe and healthy and adjust to adversity, all without the comfort of their parents nearby.

That setup only works if there are strong systems in place to guide, nurture and support the students—a setup that is fortunately firmly in place at Riordan.

"I traveled a lot when I was younger, so I've always been open-minded about these things, but of course you're a little concerned about your child going to school so far away," said Natalia Bartkowiak, whose daughter, Sofia, spent the past school year at Riordan. "After talking with Danny [Curtin] and Mr. [David] Lin, I immediately felt at peace with the decision. They were always so open and available—they provided such a sense of comfort just by talking with them."

Bartkowiak and Sofia hail from a small town outside Almería, Spain, in the country's southern coast. They found out about Riordan through friends who played in the same volleyball circuit as Sofia. Sofia was a player on the Crusaders girls volleyball team, which captured their first ever Central Coast Section Championship this year.

Like Sofia, Laura Gomez '24 came from Spain to attend Riordan, and her mother, Raquel Sange, had some initial concerns as well. Laura had spent her junior year attending a high school in North Carolina, but was interested in playing basketball at Riordan. Sange wanted a strong and supportive structure and community in place for her daughter, and she found that Riordan met all her family needs.

"We knew this was going to be a big effort from all of us," said Sange, whose daughter graduated from Riordan in 2024. "But going to Riordan was the best possible decision we could have made for Laura. Not only in terms of her education, but her personal growth. She came back as this other person—a more mature, grown up person. It was like she was an adult."



Laura Gomez '24, second from left, with her family on the Riordan campus.

> "We knew this was going to be a big effort from all of us. But going to Riordan was the best possible decision we could have made for Laura. "
>
> **Raquel Sange, Mother of Laura Gomez '24**

Almost immediately upon enrolling at Riordan, Laura unfortunately tore her ACL, sadly thwarting her plans to play basketball at the school. Despite the huge setback, Laura and her mother agreed to stay enrolled at Riordan—a testament to the community she had already built at the school.

"Maybe in another situation, I would have asked her to come back immediately and recover with her family back home in Madrid," said Sange. "But I could see that she was in such good hands at Riordan. Everyone was keeping me updated on a daily basis. It was such a relief to know that she was being cared for so well."

Bartowiak shared a similar story of her daughter Sofia's first days on campus. While she didn't suffer a devastating injury, Sofia had trouble initially at Riordan, struggling to adapt to the new environment while still learning to perfect her English. Bartowiak said those initial challenges helped Sofia grow and mature, and she ultimately emerged happier than ever at Riordan.

"There was definitely a culture shock at first," said Bartowiak. "But she made some really great friends there who supported her through that first month. She had some friends from Spain there who she could talk to, but she really ended up making friends with plenty of students outside the boarding program."

Both the Bartowiak and Sange-Gomez families had an opportunity to visit Riordan and San Francisco, with the mothers saying the trips were a lifetime highlight.

"I tell my friends back in Spain—it's like something out of the movies," said Bartowiak. "Visiting Riordan was like what you expect private schools in America to be. We took our two younger daughters on the trip, and they both fell in love with the place. Now they are determined to go to Riordan as well."

Sange had a similar experience when her family visited with Laura.

"When I was there, I thought to myself—'I wish I had more daughters!'" said Sange. "Because I would send them all to Riordan."

SPORTS

Crusaders Boys Basketball Team Smashes Numerous Records En Route to Another Outstanding Season

It was another historic season for the Riordan boys basketball team, with the Crusaders racking up 28 wins en route to their fourth straight West Catholic Athletic League title and third straight Central Coast Section championship.

Led by seniors Andrew Hilman ’26 and JP Pihtovs ’26, the Crusaders ran their winning streak against WCAL opponents to a record 51 games while extending their run against CCS teams to 58 straight victories. These wins firmly established the Crusaders as a dynasty for the ages.

The Crusaders ultimately bowed out in the Northern California Open Division Finals, losing to Salesian-Richmond by a score of 59-54 in overtime. While the Crusaders were unable to match a repeat appearance in the California Open Division title game, this year’s squad will still be remembered as one of the best in school history.

“I think this season proved that we have built a winning culture here at Riordan,” said head coach Joey Curtin ’01. “We have that championship DNA in our system. For all the great Riordan teams we’ve had at this school, none have ever won three straight CCS championships. Our guys can be so proud of all they accomplished.”

In a season filled with individual and team highlights, two games stood out among the rest for the Crusaders. In the first game, played against rival



This year saw the Crusaders extend its winning streak against CCS opponents to an unprecedented 58 straight games.









It was another historic season for the Riordan boys basketball season, highlighted by a fourth straight WCAL title.

Saint Ignatius on the home campus of the University of San Francisco, the Crusaders pulled off a dramatic 53-51 win in front of 4,000 fans. Despite facing a triple-team, Hilman sank a tough jumper in the lane at the buzzer to seal the victory.

Three weeks later and playing in front of a raucous home crowd, the Crusaders again pulled off a nail-biter against SI, winning 100-95 in double overtime. Riordan beat SI for a third time to capture their CCS Open Division title.

Hilman capped off his sterling four-year career by winning an astounding 105 games, cementing his legacy as one of the greatest players in Riordan history. Hilman was named WCAL Player of the Year and was joined by Pihtovs on the All-League First Team. Senior DJ Armstrong and junior Cole White garnered Second Team All-League honors. Following the completion of the season, both Hilman and Pihtovs accepted scholarships to play basketball at USF next year.

> “I try to tell my players and our coaches not to take what we’ve accomplished for granted. This is something really, really special we’ve put together here.”
>
> **Joey Curtin ’01, Boys Basketball Head Coach**

“I try to tell my players and our coaches not to take what we’ve accomplished for granted,” said Curtin. “This is something really, really special we’ve put together here. We’re in the middle of the season and grinding things out, it can be hard to reflect on anything. But when you have that moment to stop and appreciate everything, it’s really amazing what this team has done.”



The Riordan Crusaders team capped off a memorable season with the school's first CCS Division title in girls' volleyball.

Riordan Volleyball Reaches New Heights, Securing School's First CCS Volleyball Championship

When Jennifer Niemeyer first joined Archbishop Riordan High School as its Dean of Students and girls volleyball coach in 2022, the school was in the midst of a transformational change. Ahead of the 2020-2021 school year, Riordan officially became a co-ed institution, after more than 70 years as an all-boys' school. Building a girls volleyball program in the West Catholic Athletic League—among the most challenging high school leagues in America—essentially from scratch would be no small feat.

"To start creating a competitive and positive volleyball culture after only having girls at the school for two years is not for the faint of heart," Niemeyer told us.

But, as they say: No guts, no glory. And in Niemeyer's fourth year leading the program, her team weathered a brutal WCAL schedule and reached the CIF Central Coast Section (CCS) Division III Championship, where they defeated Santa Cruz High School for the title. It was a particularly gratifying moment for Niemeyer and the junior and senior student-athletes that have shepherded the program's growth.

"We built a varsity team that luckily includes hard-working and strong girls who have been here for 3-4 years," Niemeyer said. "They've seen it all and know what it takes to compete in the WCAL and against CCS teams, even when we were always the smallest or least experienced on the court. So to then have the ability to integrate our boarding students, some sophomores and freshmen who are talented and ready to learn, to compete—they became such a fun team to coach all season. I am very proud of them."

The team was defined by its toughness: Even as multiple key players missed time early in the season, the squad was able to take a set off of powerhouse Archbishop Mitty and defeat Sacred Heart Cathedral for the first time in program history. She





"I had girls playing out of position and sophomores and freshmen starting to make sure we stayed competitive and balanced. They all embraced their roles and played hard for their teammates, no matter who was on the other side of the net."

Jennifer Niemeyer, Dean of Students & Girls Volleyball Head Coach

pointed to the leadership of Amelia Leha'Uli '26, the team's starting outside hitter and "go-to player," and Hayden Chan '26, the team's libero and defensive anchor, for keeping the team upbeat and together through adversity.

"I had girls playing out of position and sophomores and freshmen starting to make sure we stayed competitive and balanced," Niemeyer told us. "They all embraced their roles and played hard for their teammates, no matter who was on the other side of the net."

The WCAL will test the mettle of even the most established programs, and even as losses piled up during league play, Niemeyer stressed to her team—particularly to the younger players—that the challenges of the WCAL would serve them well in the CCS playoffs.

And she was correct—iron sharpens iron. After defeating Santa Cruz in the CCS Championship, Riordan advanced to the NorCal Division III playoffs, beating Sonora in straight sets to reach the quarterfinals. There, in a hard-fought five-set match against cross-town rival Abraham Lincoln High School, Riordan's season would come to an end.

And though only a select few teams can win their last game of the season, Riordan walked out of the gym with gratitude, taking pride in all they accomplished together. For Niemeyer, this year's squad will prove instrumental as she continues to build the program—the young players who experienced the highs and lows of this season, won a championship and grew in their roles will be the foundation for Riordan's next championship squad.

But before looking too far ahead, Niemeyer expressed how wonderful it was to coach this team, this year: "I love how much they care for each other, and how they have created such strong bonds. And because they love to compete and learn, they make it a true joy to coach them. They trusted the process, they trusted each other, they trusted the coaches, and they never gave up. And all the while they had fun doing it!"






Riordan's high powered football team averaged more than 42 points per game en route to capturing the school's first ever CCS Open Championship. Photos by Ethan Ly '26 and Loghan Hwang '27 of The Crusader.

Riordan football's historic season lifts program to new heights

Heading into the 2025 season, expectations for Riordan football were higher than ever, with star quarterback Mike Mitchell '26, four receivers receiving Division 1 recruiting interest—Cynai Thomas '26, Judge Nash '26, Perrion Williams '26 and Kyle Welch '26—and a punishing offensive line anchored by top-50 recruit Tommy Tofi '26 and Michael Langi '26.

Pairing the high-powered offense with a deep, talented defense, Riordan rolled through the West Catholic Athletic League schedule, posting an undefeated regular season record. After consecutive seven-win seasons showed a team on the rise, this year was a proof of concept for Head Coach Adhir Ravipati, who—along with Mitchell—has helped lead a remarkable turnaround of a program that had fallen on hard times, having posted just four winning seasons this millennium before Ravipati took over.

After defeating Salinas in their first game of the CCS Open Division Playoffs, Riordan faced historic WCAL powerhouse Serra in the CCS Open Division Championship, just two weeks after Serra gave the team one of its toughest tests of the season. But behind a dominant 30-carry, 161-yard performance from running back Adonyae Brown '27, Riordan easily claimed the CCS Open Division crown for the first time in school history.

"I think that really speaks to the players' commitment and resilience and just how badly they wanted this," Ravipati told the San Francisco Chronicle after the win.

And while the magical ride ended in Folsom, with a heartbreaking 42-38 loss in the NorCal Division 1-AA Championship, the team's historic season served as a springboard for the players and program as a whole. Mitchell (Stanford), Tofi (Oregon), Thomas (Oregon State), Nash (Harvard), Williams (Nevada) and Langi (Oregon State) are among the team's student-athletes committed to play college football next year, and Ravipati and his staff hope to use their examples to continue the program's upward trajectory.








Numerous players from the 2025 Crusaders' squad are set to play Division 1 college football next season. Photos by Ethan Ly '26 and Loghan Hwang '27 of The Crusader.

2025-26 CRUSADER STATS

- Central Coast Section Open Division Champion
- Northern California Division 1-AA Runner Up
- 12-1 Season Record
- 7-0 League Record

> "I think [winning the CCS Open Division] really speaks to the players' commitment and resilience and just how badly they wanted this."
>
> **Adhir Ravipati, Football Head Coach**



Riordan's Esports team is now a school-sanctioned sport competing in national events. Photo by Lance yearbook staff.

Level Up: How One Teacher's Leap of Faith Built a Championship Esports Program at Riordan

A year into the pandemic, with students and teachers settling into a new reality of Zoom classes and virtual everything, educators everywhere, including Social Studies teacher Cory Nelson, were looking for ways to keep building community in digital spaces. It turned out a student named Santiago Maldonado '24 was thinking along the same lines, and his pitch was simple: We play video games anyway. Why not make it a team?

Nelson was in. But convincing the school was another story. It took persistence from both Nelson and Maldonado, and a promise that the program wouldn't cost the school anything to get it off the ground. Once the administration felt confident they could support it, the green light came. And once it did, something unexpected started to take shape at Archbishop Riordan.

Today, the Riordan Esports program is a school-sanctioned athletic team competing in multiple games nationally. And for Nelson, the championships and playoff runs, including a regional Mario Kart title and an Elite Eight finish in a 64-school national tournament, are almost beside the point.

"We've had shy students come in and emerge as leaders," he said. "Some run their team in-game, others step into student leadership roles. Beyond the skills, it gives kids a place where they belong."





The Esports team competes in six different games, and had a top-eight finish in a 64-team tournament. Photos by Lance yearbook staff.

"Beyond the skills, it gives kids a place where they belong."

Cory Nelson, Social Studies Teacher

That sense of belonging is what makes the program unusual. Esports draws a genuinely diverse mix of students–the outgoing and the reserved, the athlete and the introvert–and puts them side by side, competing toward a common goal. Nelson describes it as a program that simultaneously expands and shrinks the world for its players. It builds a bigger community for some students while giving others a smaller, safer circle where they can finally feel at home.

"You get kids who don't normally interact in the hallways or the cafeteria, and suddenly they're finding each other and saying, 'Hey, we're getting down on Smash today, right?'" Nelson said. "That's really my biggest love for this."

The program now competes across six games, including Valorant, Marvel Rivals, League of Legends, and Super Smash Brothers, with students practicing four days a week during the season. The students who have seen the program's impact most clearly are the seniors graduating this year, the first class to have been part of Esports all four years. Several have come back to Nelson to tell him how the program pushed them outside their comfort zones and helped them grow into leaders they didn't know they could be.

That kind of growth hasn't gone unnoticed. The school recently invested $25,000 in new computers, monitors, and training programs, a signal that the broader Riordan community is now seeing what Nelson has seen all along. His vision for what comes next is just as ambitious. He wants to see Riordan Esports recognized as a full WCAL sport, on par with baseball, tennis, and football, and competing in a formal Bay Area conference. He also wants more people watching: the team streams its games live on Twitch, YouTube, and Instagram.

"It would just be cool to have a conference where we get to compete, just like the other sports do," he said.

For alumni who might be skeptical about whether gaming belongs alongside traditional athletics, Nelson has a simple answer: experience a match. Watch a quiet freshman find his voice calling plays for his team. Watch a group of students who never thought of themselves as athletes chase a national title together.

That's what Riordan Esports looks like. And it's only getting started.

SCHOOL NEWS

Alum Francisco Aragon Cultivates Next Generation of Poets and Writers at Riordan

Francisco Aragon ’84 can speak firsthand about the transformative experience of an inspirational educator.

Aragon, a professor at the University of Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies and a widely published poet and translator, had an inkling that his favorite classes in high school were those that involved language arts. That sentiment was confirmed in the early 80s under the mentorship and guidance of his cross country coach and religion teacher at Riordan, Tom Barber.

“One day, I was in Mr. Barber’s classroom after school and he had a book on his desk that caught my eye,” said Aragon. “It turns out it was a book of poems by someone named Robert Hass, someone who had actually been Mr. Barber’s teacher at Saint Mary’s College in Moraga. And so Robert Hass, a former U.S. Poet Laureate, was the first contemporary, living American poet that I ever read. “

“I was immediately inspired and really haven’t looked back since. But it was through Mr. Barber’s support and guidance that I was able to explore that path more intentionally once I enrolled at UC Berkeley in the mid 80s.”

Knowing how impactful one encounter can be, Aragon began sponsoring a new initiative at Riordan that brings poets into the classroom. Aragon



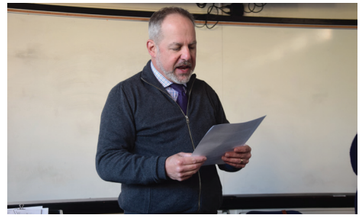
Francisco Aragon ’84, right, with Michael Vezzali-Pascal ’88, left, and poet Adela Najarro, center. Aragon is a professor at the University of Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies. Photo by Ishaan Gupta ’26 of The Crusader.

kickstarted that program himself two years ago, visiting teacher Michael Vezzali-Pascual’s AP English class, where students read and studied his book, “After Rubén,” before he came to meet with the class in person.

“Part of our mission at Letras Latinas is to amplify and promote our community’s storytellers, whether that be fiction writers, poets, essayists, or playwrights,” said Aragon. “And part of that process is to place writers in community spaces. I thought Riordan would be an ideal home for that community partnership to take place.”

Mindful of the importance of bringing in an array of different voices to the class, Aragon invited Adela Najarro to take over the role of visiting poet for the 2025–26 school year. Like Aragon, Najarro was born in San Francisco and had familial roots from Nicaragua, a country with an impressive creative writing lineage.







Visiting poet Adela Najarro, top, and Michael Vezzali-Pascal ’88, bottom left, read to Riordan students upon invitation from Francisco Aragon ’84. Photos by Ishaan Gupta ’26 of The Crusader.

For this past school year, Vezzali-Pascual’s English class read Najarro’s latest book of poetry, “Variations in Blue.” Each student was given a copy of the book, courtesy of Letras Latinas, the literary initiative that Aragon founded and currently directs at the Institute for Latino Studies at Notre Dame, where he’s been a faculty member since 2003.

“It is so important to me that students in our English classes see and hear working poets while immersing themselves in language and literature,” said AP English teacher Michael Vezzali-Pascual ’88. “It is also vital that they see themselves centered in the curriculum of our highest level English classes so that they can envision for themselves the endless possibilities that exist for them. With this series that Francisco has sponsored over the last two years, students have had the opportunity to experience living poets who are doing the vital work of culture-building, especially important at this moment in our nation’s history.”

Najarro noted that the AP English class was engaging in both literary analysis and creative writing exercises, establishing what she called a “well-rounded educational experience at Riordan.” Following the completion of her fall semester visit, Najarro said that numerous students lined up to request that she autograph their books, an experience she called incredibly moving.

“It was such a beautiful interaction,” said Najarro. “And it allowed me to remind them to keep reading poetry and novels. I was able to impart the importance of that lifelong love, because ultimately you explore not just your literacy, but your humanity as well.”

With such stirring sentiments relayed from visiting poets, there is little wonder why Aragon is excited about continuing this program. He’s currently considering which writer Letras Latinas will bring next, and he aspires to make this a lasting partnership between Riordan and the University of Notre Dame.

During Aragon’s second class visit, last year, another member of the Riordan community who took notice and introduced himself was Brian Morgan, who works in Riordan’s office of Alumni Relations.

“Francisco possesses rare qualities that I know are skills we all aspire to have,” said Morgan, who helps coordinate the writer’s visits. “Beyond his studies, accomplishments, published works, and ongoing work as an educator at Notre Dame, he is simultaneously a great listener and storyteller. To be more succinct, he connects people. It only seems natural that he would want to connect where he is now to where he is from. Our team at Riordan is always looking to serve our students and teachers. In this case, I am happy to be part of the department linking Francisco, and his network of poets and writers, to the current students and teachers here at Riordan. Being a Crusader means having the opportunity in the classroom to learn from and connect with accomplished writers. To help inspire the next generation of authors and artists with real experience from the mouths and pens of people such as Francisco, and his fellow poet Adela, is one of the parts of my job that I love.”

“From my own experiences, I know how important it is to meet, engage and interact with living writers—with people who’ve dedicated their life to this craft,” added Aragon, who was the valedictorian of his 1984 graduating class at Riordan. “There is a special kind of inspiration that comes from that personal involvement. That’s why I’m excited to keep coming back to Riordan, to make sure this partnership continues into the future.”

Andrew Hazard Named New Director of Advancement

Andrew Hazard, a San Francisco native with deep ties to the Riordan community, has been named the school's new Director of Advancement, taking the reins of a role that oversees alumni engagement, community relations, parent and community partnerships, and fundraising initiatives.

With a background that spans education, sales leadership, organizational development, and community building, Hazard brings a unique set of skills to the role, and nearly his entire family—his father, brother, brother-in-law and uncles—are Riordan alumni. Additionally, he has a daughter, Annabelle '27, and a son, Caden '29, currently attending Riordan. It was from their collective experience that Hazard became inspired to pursue the Director of Advancement position.

"What I learned from them, and from my experience growing up in San Francisco's Catholic community, is that Riordan is a home for everyone," said Hazard. "No matter what your background is, no matter what your interests are—you will be accepted. Riordan feels like a place where everyone arrived for Thanksgiving from all over the world and everyone felt comfortable at the dinner table."

Hazard was born and raised in the San Francisco Catholic community that Riordan has served for generations—which means the relationships he brings to this role were built through shared faith, shared neighborhoods, shared values and shared history. His journey of Catholic connection has led him from Our Lady of Mercy in Daly City to earning his master's in organizational development at University of San Francisco, with stops at St. Ignatius and Santa Clara University along the way.

"I'm a big believer in community and Riordan has a lot of different communities that I'm part of," said Hazard. "I've been part of the Catholic, faith-based community all my life so this really feels like coming home for me."

Hazard said he's excited to map out the future for the Advancement Department at Riordan.



Andrew Hazard is set to lead Riordan's Advancement Department.

> "I'm a big believer in community and Riordan has a lot of different communities that I'm part of."
>
> **Andrew Hazard, Director of Advancement**

"I really see my role here as helping support and carve the path for the future of Riordan—for that next set of students and families who will be joining our community," said Hazard. "This is such a wonderful opportunity to support kids and to give them a place that's going to propel them into the future."







This year's crab feed raised more than $27,000 for tuition assistance programs.

Riordan Hosts Another Successful Crab Feed

Nearly 500 people came out for Riordan's annual Crab Feed this January, with the event raising $27,000 in sponsorship and raffle proceeds for tuition assistance.

Held on January 24, attendees enjoyed more than 1,500 pounds of crab meat, coordinated with the help of Riordan alumnus Justin Monfredini '99. Complementary dishes were prepared by the school's onsite catering company, Epicurean, which also crafted a crab marinade along with salad, garlic bread, and cookies for the dinner.

Along with that bountiful banquet, the Crab Feed featured a curated playlist provided by DJ Jason Aquino '86, making the event a true family affair for Riordan alumni.

"We were really happy with the turnout of this year's Crab Feed," said Christina Durkan, Riordan's Director of Special Events. "Our parents and alumni once again showed how much they care about our school. These fundraising events are critical to the success of Riordan and they can only happen with the help of our community. Special thanks to the team of Riordan moms, alumni and current students, who helped make this event a success."



Riordan educator David Lin '99, with students taking the 5 Buckets Literacy Course. Photo by Loghan Hwang '27.

Created By Alum Steve Mayer '72, 5 Buckets is Teaching Students How to Financially Prepare for Life

Like countless other good ideas, the genesis for the 5 Buckets Foundation can be traced back to the buffet line.

It was at an accounting conference, waiting to eat some food, that Riordan alum Steve Mayer '72, struck up a conversation with a fellow managing partner from the industry.

"I think this other guy was from North Dakota, and he told me that he was working in both wealth management and accounting, which we can't do in California for legal reasons," said Mayer, who is a longtime member of Riordan's Board of Trustees and one of the school's most dedicated donors. "It made me realize that so many people in California probably have four different financial advisors, all helping them in different areas and none of them talking to each other. I realized how confusing that could get and how I could help simplify things."

That unexpectedly inspiring conversation planted the seeds for what would become 5 Buckets, a financial literary program that offers so much more than just accounting advice. It's fundamentally about being resilient and durable in the face of adversity, and it's now being taught to interested students at Riordan, who study Mayer's illustrated book, "5 Buckets, 4 Shovels, a Beach and a Map," and a companion guide for young adults, "Adulting 101: A Guide to Personal Finance."





5 Buckets was founded by Riordan alum Steven Mayer '72 to help students prepare financially for life. Photos by Loghan Hwang '27.

The books evolved into a nonprofit organization, the 5 Buckets Foundation, and a financial literary curriculum that offers so much more than just accounting advice. To date, the Foundation has educated close to 6,000 learners, and hosts workshops with schools, community groups, and businesses in the Bay Area and across the U.S. Mayer's brother, Mike, Riordan '71, has also been involved on 5 Buckets' board of directors.

At its core, 5 Buckets' programming is about being resilient and durable in the face of adversity, and it's now being taught to interested students at Riordan. The five buckets refer to different types of financial assets and the four shovels are the professional advisors needed to manage those resources. The beach—with its ever shifting sands and shorelines—denotes one's life journey and the map represents the guide to financial security.

Pei-Ling Lee, the Director of Programs and Partnerships at 5 Buckets, said the beach metaphor is a particularly apt description for what the program is seeking to teach students at Riordan.

"That metaphor is a beautiful and foundational part of our curriculum because it truly teaches us about all aspects of life," said Lee, who, in addition to teaching the classes at Riordan, used to be a Resident Advisor at the school's boarding program while working as a Marketing Communications Associate. "You have these buckets, you fill them with sand and the shovels are helpers you meet along the way. But sometimes you don't know that a big wave is coming or the weather is changing, and so your wonderful sandcastle gets knocked over. This is about dealing with uncertainty and impermanence and all other challenges we face in life."

The 5 Buckets program was most recently taught to Riordan's St. Francis Scholars, who participated in a six-part series during the last school year and learned about topics such as budgeting, building and managing credit, and developing a positive money mindset.

"As a Saint Francis scholar, I was excited to collaborate with the 5 Buckets Program to bring a valuable resource to my fellow scholars," said Isabelle Huang '27. "I personally believe that financial literacy is a crucial skill—one that a lot of high schoolers miss out on, not learning it until much later. Across the six monthly sessions held at Riordan, we learned about credit cards, loans, and debt, building wealth from stocks and investments, and everything in between. The knowledge gained from this program readily prepares us as we move on to the next chapter after high school, whether it's applying for our first credit card, taking out a college student loan, or buying a car. I'm grateful for the opportunity this program provided, and I hope it continues to benefit scholars for years to come."

Victoria Terheyden, the President of the 5 Buckets Foundation, said the goal is to eventually fully integrate the training program into the school, offering the course for more students, as well as teachers, administrators and parents.

"It's so important that in communities there's a shared language about financial wellness," said Terheyden, formerly the Director of Communications at Riordan. "We want to work with as many partners as possible, to ensure that everyone is working from the same playbook, whether that's your coach, your counselor or your teacher."

When and if that expansion occurs, it will make a long evolution from the days when Mayer attended Riordan. During his time, he was taught a basic bookkeeping class, but despite the somewhat elemental nature of the course, he credits that experience with forging him onto his career path.

"To be honest, it was incredibly helpful," said Mayer. "And I've never forgotten my Riordan roots. This is my way of giving back to a school that gave so much to me."



Part of Riordan for more than four decades, Ottilie Valverde is the school's latest Chaminade Award Winner.

Ottilie Valverde Recognized with Chaminade Award, Riordan's Top Honor

Longtime Riordan teacher Ottilie Valverde was honored with this year's Blessed William Joseph Chaminade Award. The award is the school's highest honor—one reserved for those who live out the Marianist mission through faith, service, and enduring commitment to the Riordan community.

For more than four decades, Valverde has been a constant and faithful presence on campus. She joined Riordan at a time of important transition and quickly became known not only for her excellence in the classroom but also for the quiet strength, compassion, and integrity she brings to work each day. Her career has been marked by a deep sense of vocation—an understanding that teaching is not simply a profession, but a calling.

While Valverde has shaped countless students through her work as a math teacher and department chair, her impact reaches far beyond academics. She has been a devoted supporter of Campus Ministry and a cornerstone of the retreat program, helping generations of students step away from the noise of daily life and encounter God, themselves, and one another more deeply. Through her leadership and gentle encouragement, she has helped create spaces where students feel loved.

"In my first two years at Riordan I experienced the wonderful family spirit inspired by the Marianists," said Valverde. "I was also invited to participate in the first Riordan Kairos and it was there that I found the deep heart and faith community that is now and has always been for me:





When speaking of her time at Riordan, Valverde said, "It's been work, it's been joy, it's been spirit."

> "The students and my colleagues at Riordan are now and have always been amazing–they're kind, helpful, and spiritual. I feel privileged to have been a part of it."
>
> **Ottilie Valverde, Chaminade Award Recipient**

Archbishop Riordan High School."

Valverde has also mentored students through the National Honor Society, sponsored academic clubs, coordinated retreats, and contributed meaningfully to major initiatives across campus. Her influence is woven into the spiritual and communal life of the school.

At the heart of her ministry is a genuine love for teaching and for young people. She often speaks of the joy that comes when students begin to believe in themselves, when understanding takes root and confidence grows. In those moments, she reflects the Marianist belief in educating the whole person: mind, heart, and spirit.

Students and colleagues alike describe Valverde as patient, thoughtful, and deeply grounded. During the times of uncertainty, her steady presence and faith-filled approach provided reassurance and hope to many in the community.

Through her wisdom, humility, and faithful service, Valverde has helped form not just strong students, but good people. The Chaminade Award celebrates more than 40 years of extraordinary dedication and a legacy that will continue to shape Riordan for generations to come.

"The students and my colleagues at Riordan are now and have always been amazing–they're kind, helpful, and spiritual," said Valverde. "I feel privileged to have been a part of it. It's been a journey–it's been work, it's been joy, it's been spirit."

CLASS NOTES

Class of 1955

The class of 1955 celebrated thier annual luncheon at the Basque Cultrual Center in October. They honored the current recepitent of their class scholarship, Isaiah Sanchez '26.



Class of 1963

The class of 1963 celebrated their annual luncheon at the Scoma's in June. They celebrated as the class has now established the Class of 1963 endowed scholarship.

Class of 1966

The class of 1966 celebrated their 60th reunion at Harding Park in June.

Class of 1970

The class of 1970 celebrated their 55th Reunion in November at the San Francsico Itallian Athletic Club in November. A great time was had by all!

Dan McCarthy '70

Dan McCarthy '70 was kind enough to bring NBA Champion Bruce Bowen to campus in June. Bruce was able to give a wonderful motivational speech to our varsity boys basketball team.



The Class of 1963 (shown here at 2025 luncheon).



The Class of 1966 celebrated their 60th reunion.



NBA Champion Bruce Bowen, bottom center, with Riordan varsity boys basketball team.



The Class of 1986 celebrated their 40th reunion.



Lee Opelinia '95 is the owner of Ocean Subs on Ocean Avenue. Photo by Jayden Tamboury '26 of The Crusader.

Philip Ferrigno '80



In April, Philip Ferrigno '80 was inducted into the SF State Gator Hall Of Fame. Coach Ferrigno recently completed a stellar career coaching the Lincoln HS Mustangs, amassing 158 wins.

Mark Rodriguez '83

Class of '83 Mark Rodriguez's daughter, Nykol, just graduted in May. She is headed to San Diego State to continue her education.

Oscar Lainez '86

Class of '86 Oscar Lainez's daughter, Daniella, was named Valecidctorian of the Class of 2026. She will be continuing her education at UCLA.

Jaime Maldonado '86

Class of '86 Jaime Maldonado's daughter, Iva, graduated in May. She is headed to San Diego State to continue her education in Comparative International Studies.

Class of 1986

The class of 1986 celebrated their 40th Reunion in March at the San Francisco Itallian Athletic Club. A splendid time was had by all.

Lee Opelinia '95

Lee Opelinia '95 contiues to own and operate Ocean Subs on Ocean Avenue where many a Crusader gets to enjoy his delicious creations.

Class Notes



The Class of 2000 celebrated their 25th reunion.

Jamieson Fong ’00

Class of 2000 Jamieson Fong’s son, Liam, just graduted in May. He is headed to Occidental College to continue his education and baseball career.

Class of 2000

The Class of 2000 celebrated their 25 year reunion in November at the new Student Park on campus.

Joey Curtin ’01 & Matt Straus ’02

Crusader Alums Matt Straus ’02 and Joey Curtin ’01 welcomed Stephen Currry and Rakuten to the Crusader Forum to shoot a commerical in December. Matt’s production company did a tremendous job delievering a wonderful shoot and the commercial was a huge success.



Joey Curtin ’01 and Matt Straus ’02 with Golden State Warriors player Stephen Curry.

Anthony Garcia ’05



Anthony Garcia ’02, the in-game host for the San Francisco Giants, became the on air host for the Giants radio pre-game show on KNBR this season.



SFFD firefighters Daniel Orengo ’09, James Carter ’10, and Lieutenant Jeff Roy ’03

Fuad Buba ’09



Fuad Buba ’09 is a successful businessman and entrepreneur. He owns and operates IBs resturants in Berkeley and Oakland. He recently opened a location in Santa Clara to much fanfare.

Jeff Roy ’03, Daniel Orengo ’03 & James Carter ’10

Firefighters James Carter ’10 , Daniel Orengo ’09, and Lieutenant Jeff Roy ’03 continue to serve the Sunset neighborhood for SFFD, Engine 18.

Class of 2015

The Class of 2015 celebrated its 10 year reunion in North Beach in December. Thank you to Joey Miles ’15 for leading the effort on a wonderful night.

Zachary Quanico ’19



Zachary Quanico ’19 recently became a member of the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department. The moment was made even more special as his father James, Chief Deputy, pinned his badge at his graduation ceremony.

Christian Mibach ’19



Christian Mibach ’19, son of Paul Mibach ’87, recently completed basic training with the U.S. Coast Guard, graduating at the top of his class. He now begins his next chapter, serving at a base in the Pacific Northwest, ready to protect and serve the nation’s waterways.

Bradley Campos ’23



Bradley Campos ’23 is currently a student at USF and served as a D.C. Fellow spending this past semester in the capitol interning in the office of New Jersey Congressman Josh Gottheimer.

Angelina Ning ’23



Angelina Ning ’23 is now a junior in the pre-law program at UCLA. She hopes to practice intellectual property or international law.

GRADUATION

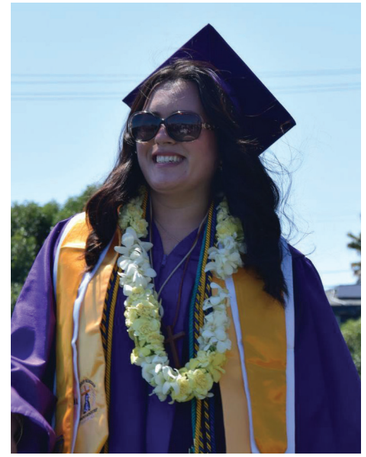
Class of 2026 College Acceptances & Matriculation

In addition to attending the schools below, members of the Class of 2026 will also be returning to their home countries and pursuing various opportunities, including entering seminary, flight school, religious mission trip, and joining the electrical trade.

University of Alabama*
Albion College
Allegheny College
University of Arizona*
Arizona State University
  Polytechnic
  Tempe*
University of Arkansas*
Austin College
Azusa Pacific U*
Baylor University
Beloit College*
Berklee College of Music*
Boise State University
Boston University*
Butte College^
Brandeis University
Bryn Mawr College
University of California
  Berkeley* (6 attending)
  Davis* (3 attending)
  Irvine*
  (16 acceptances/7 attending)
  Los Angeles* (6 attending)
  Merced* (3 attending)
  Riverside* (9 attending)
  San Diego*
  (18 acceptances /5 attending)
  Santa Barbara*
  Santa Cruz* (5 attending)
California Baptist University
California Lutheran University*
California State University,
  Bakersfield
  Chico*
  Dominguez Hills
  East Bay
  Fresno
  Fullerton*
  Long Beach*
  Los Angeles
  Monterey Bay*
  Northridge
  Sacramento*
  San Diego* (9 attending)
  San Francisco*
  San Jose*^
  San Marcos*
  Sonoma
  Stanislaus
California State Polytechnic University,
  Humboldt*
  Pomona*
San Luis Obispo* (10 attending)
Carnegie Mellon University
Carleton College
Catholic University of America
Central Washington University
Centre College
Chaminade University of Honolulu
Chapman University*
City College of San Francisco*^
Clark University*
Clark Atlanta University*
U of Colorado, Boulder*
U of Colorado, Denver
Colorado Mountain College*
Colorado State University, Fort Collins*
University of Connecticut
Connecticut College
University of Connecticut
Cornell University
Creighton University
DePaul University
University of Dayton
Dominican University of California*
University of Denver
University of Detroit Mercy
Drexel University*
Duke Kunshan University
Duquesne University
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical
University, Prescott
The Evergreen State College
Felician University*
Foothill College*
Fordham University
Florida Atlantic University
Fresno Pacific University
Georgetown University
George Washington University*
Georgia State University
Gonzaga University*^(6 attending)
Goucher College
Grinnell College
College of the Holy Cross*
Hampton University
Harvard University^
University of Hawaii at Manoa*
Hawai'i Pacific University
University of Hong Kong*
Hope College*
Howard University*
University of Idaho*
U of Illinois at Chicago
U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
Indiana State University
Ithaca College
Jackson State University
Juniata College
Kalamazoo College
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
Kenyon College
Knox College
University of La Verne
Lake Forest College
Lawrence University
Leeward Community College*
Lewis & Clark College
Linfield University
Long Island University
Louisiana State University
Loyola University Chicago*
Loyola Marymount University*
  (4 attending)
Loyola University Chicago
Loyola University Maryland
Loyola University New Orleans
Manhattanville University
Marquette University
University of Massachusetts
  Amherst
  Boston*
McDaniel
McGill University
Menlo College
Mercer University
University of Michigan*
Michigan State University
Midway University*
University of Minnesota Twin Cities
The University of Montana*
Montana State University
Morgan State University
Mount Saint Mary's University
University of Mississippi
University of Nevada
  Las Vegas
  Reno*^
The New School*
New York University*
North Carolina A&T State University
Northeastern University*
Northern Arizona University
University of Notre Dame
Northwest Nazarene University*
Oberlin College
Occidental College*^
The Ohio State University
University of Oklahoma
University of Oregon*^ (5 attending)
Oregon State University*^
Otis College of Art and Design
Pace University*
University of the Pacific*
Pacific Lutheran University
Palm Beach Atlantic University
Palm Beach State College*
Penn State University
Pepperdine University
Pitzer College (3 acceptances!)
Point Loma University
University of Portland*
Portland State University
Providence College
University of Puget Sound
Purdue University*
University of Redlands
Queen's University Belfast (Ireland)*
Reed College*
Regis University
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
University of Rochester*
Rochester Institute of Technology
Saint Joseph's University
Saint Louis University
Saint Mary's College of CA*
  (8 attending)
University of San Diego*
University of San Francisco*
  (19 attending)
College of San Mateo*
Santa Barbara City College*
Santa Clara University*
Seattle Pacific University
Seattle University
Seton Hall University
Skyline College*
Simmons University*
University of South Florida*
University of Southern California
  (7 Admits, 1 might attend)
Southern Methodist University
St. Mary's University of Texas*
St. John's University*
St. Olaf College*
St. Thomas Aquinas College*
Skyline College*
Stanford University*^
SUNY Korea*
SUNY University at Stony Brook
Swarthmore College*
Syracuse University
The University of Tampa
Temple University
Temple University, Japan Campus
The University of Texas at Dallas
Texas A&M University*
Texas Southern University*
University of Toronto*
Tufts University
Union College
University of Utah
University of Vermont
University of Victoria
Virginia Polytechnic Institute*
University of Washington
  Seattle*
  Tacoma
Washington College
Washington State University*
Western Colorado University
Western New England University
Western Washington University
Westmont College
Whitman College*^
Willamette University*
The College of Wooster
Worcester Polytechnic Institute*
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Xavier University

*Indicates at least one student is attending the college
^Athletic Commit













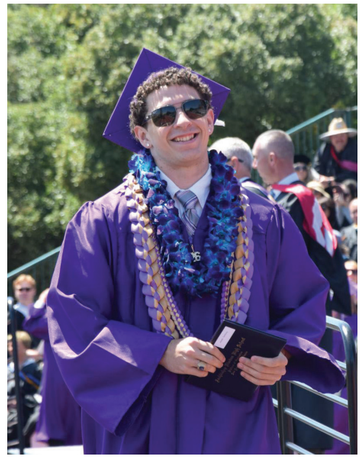
Photos by Kaia Burris '27, Rachel Gerke '27, and Jackson Padilla '27 of The Crusader

















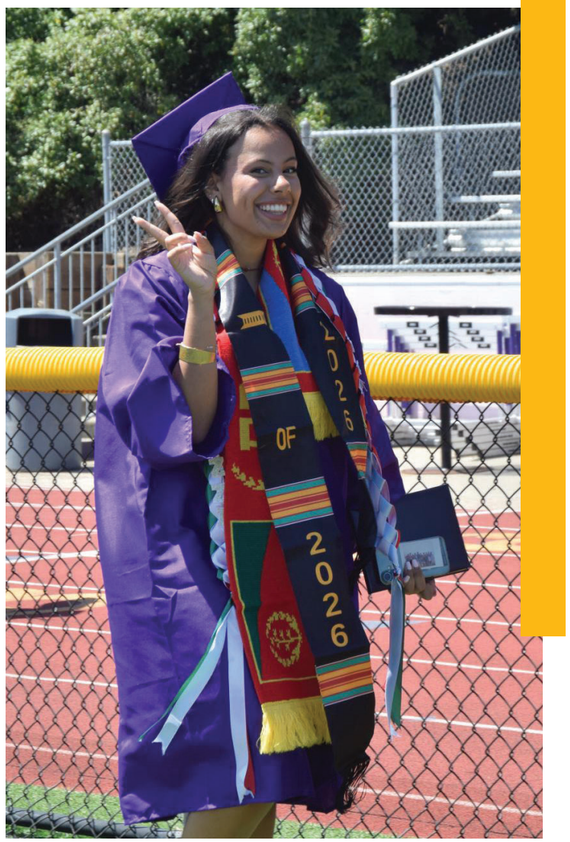


Photos by Kaia Burris '27, Rachel Gerke '27, and Jackson Padilla '27 of The Crusader









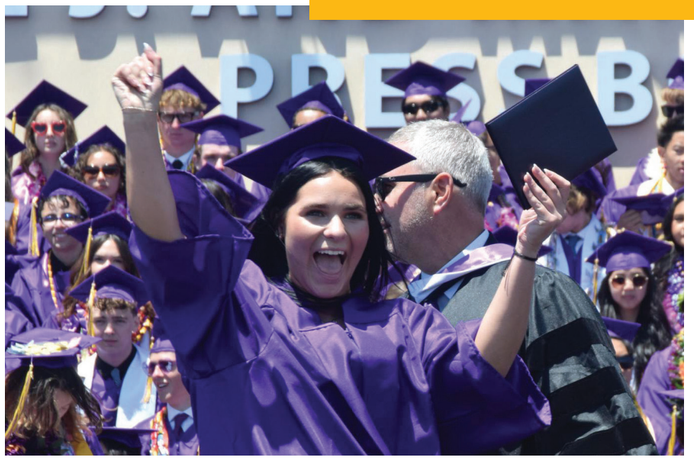












Photos by Kaia Burris '27, Rachel Gerke '27, and Jackson Padilla '27 of The Crusader

Riordan Honors Graduating Seniors With Awards

On April 30, Riordan hosted its Senior Farewell ceremony, where seniors were honored with a variety of awards, many in commemoration of Riordan alumni.



The Russi House Saint Award
Mark Gabancho ’26



The Joe Dominguez School Spirit Award
Freddie Michalchuk ’26 and Ben Parker ’26



The Pilar House Saint Award
Ozzy Wadsworth ’26



The Cana House Saint Award
E’moni Ferdinand ’26



Bolts House Saint Award
Ashling Greene ’26



The James Sabolboro Award
Julia O’Neill ’26 and Dylan Dubriwny ’26



The Blessed Jakob Gapp Award
Jerard Loyola ’26 and Briana Alvarado ’26



The Jesse Cortez Award
William Fong ’26 and Alyssa Abaunza ’26



The Bill Blanchard Award
Brock Garcia ’26 and Nykol Rodriguez ’26



The Edward Fennelly Award
Andrew Hilman ’26 and Maddalena Dito ’26



The Tyrone McGraw Award
Michael Mitchell ’26 and Georgie Michalchuk ’26

Photos by Loghan Hwang ’27 and Ethan Ly ’26 of The Crusader

Archbishop Riordan High School
175 Frida Kahlo Way
San Francisco, CA 94112

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
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PERMIT NO. 1237

UPCOMING FALL EVENTS

Annual Golf Tournament
Monday, September 14, 11:30 AM
Shotgun Start, TPC Harding Park

Football Alumni Tailgate
Saturday, October 10, 11:00 AM
Football game v. SHC

Purple and Gold Gala
Friday November 6, 5:30 PM
Bimbo's 365 Club in North Beach