



Mr. David Card '87, Ms. Gretchen Kessler, Ms. Carol Ann Sass, and Ms. Marion Curtis pose for a photo in front of the Kessler Family Library. Photo courtesy of RJ Communications Office.

## THE WISDOM OF ONE WOMAN

### THE KESSLER FAMILY LIBRARY HONORS GRETCHEN KESSLER, THE FIRST PRINCIPAL OF THE GIRLS DIVISION

by Hayden Oh '25

The Girls Division's library has been a cornerstone of Regis Jesuit since the development of Campbell Campus in 1989. It has remained a constant, essential space for students for decades through its timeless architecture and welcoming atmosphere. The library has continued its tradition of accommodating students, clubs, and classes. This year, however, it's under a new name: The Kessler Family Library.

The namesake honors Gretchen Kessler, one of the few faculty members on-campus who have been present since the founding of the Girls Division in 2003. As the first principal of the Girls Division, Kessler has watched Regis Jesuit evolve into a mature, co-divisional institution.

"I got the call offering me the job, and I moved out here in March of 2003. I had been going back and forth from Buffalo the year before that, starting to hire, starting the planning, and all of the things that went into starting the school, and everything fell into place, so I thought God, it's meant to be," Kessler described.

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While the now-boys' building was under construction, the girls began their first year at Saint Catherine's Greek Orthodox Church with 179 freshmen and sophomores.

"[The church] was a blessing in disguise because we got to establish our community. Every day, we began prayer and announcements in a really big circle, and every day, we'd end the day in a big circle with prayer, and there were so many things that we did as a small community that set the groundwork for the future years," said Kessler.

The girls moved to campus the following year with 326 students, establishing athletics,

activities, and a retreat program. “Not without struggles, but the joys far outweighed the struggles,” said Kessler.

“Some parents were nervous about a new school. It wasn’t a new school, but it was a new school, but we had all this tradition behind us as Jesuit education, and that satisfied their anxieties. The girls had come from different public schools, and they merged as one, and all of them stay in touch years later, and they’re having kids now, and it’s just wonderful,” Kessler explained.

Despite the initial difficulties of recruiting girls to put their faith into Regis Jesuit for their education, the school quickly formed a tight-knit community. Today, the legacy of those close bonded first girls’ classes have shaped the culture of the division.

“The very first class was 39 seniors. They all did one Kairos together, so that was a really impactful experience in their junior year. I love how the girls support each other and care for each other through the activities, the athletics, the retreats, and the service experiences, and the overalls! There are little nuances that make it so special.”

After teaching for 45 years, Kessler now works on-campus as the school alumnae liaison. With her plethora of personal relationships with the alumnae, she naturally connects the rich history of Regis Jesuit to the present day. Today, the school honors her legacy with the

rebranding of the Girls Division library to The Kessler Family Library.

“It was a great honor to have the library named after me and my parents. It’s not just me. My dad was a teacher at a Jesuit high school for 42 years. He went to a Jesuit high school and was a teacher. My mother was a librarian and she worked at the Jesuit high school in Buffalo for 14 years before she had me, so Jesuit education is in our blood,” described Kessler.

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Jesuit education has played a vital role in the Kessler family as well as the thousands of Regis Jesuit alumnae and the current student body. The founding of the Girls Division 20 years ago has given girls the opportunity to indulge in the rich tradition of the Society of Jesus.

“We do education well, but it’s not just the education per se. It’s the spirituality, it’s good for everybody, it grounds you. It has something for everyone. We wanted to give the girls what we have been giving for boys forever: the spirituality, the community, seeing God in everything and everyone —

that’s a good way to live life,” said Kessler.

As she has watched each step the Girls Division has taken to reach its current maturity, Kessler is undoubtedly one of the most influential figures on campus. Her devotion to Jesuit education has been formative to countless young women in their educational and spiritual journeys.

“Take advantage of all Regis has to offer intellectually, religiously, and otherwise, and activity-wise and athletic-wise, and challenge yourself to take chances — good chances,” Kessler wisely advised.

Kessler’s contributions to Regis Jesuit will forever live on through the rich community of the Girls Division and written above the library entrance.

Kessler proclaimed, “I hope thousands and thousands of girls come and partake in all of the student life and challenge themselves to grow. I think we do God’s work, and I think generations from now, we’ll still be doing God’s work. I won’t be here, but the school will still be doing God’s work.”