

November 2013

Riordan Hall in Bella Vista is a popular place for groups to hold their holiday celebrations and conduct other activities. The building was opened 40 years ago this fall, and has become the “community center” for Bella Vista. It and the street on which it is located is named for John Riordan (pronounced “REAR-dan”), who was the first general manager of the Bella Vista Country Club (renamed the Property Owners Association in March, 1973).

Riordan’s hiring was announced in the the April 1968 issue of the Village Vista. He was hired as Vice President for Community Services of the Cherokee Village Development Company (which became Cooper Communities), but his main responsibility was to manage the property owners association. He was a busy man...not only did he work for Cooper and for the property owners, he was also on the POA board, serving as president from 1971 until he retired in November 1975.

The Village Vista reported on Riordan, *“He is a native of Milwaukee and worked for 29 years for the (Philadelphia based) Slater System, a nationwide firm that operates food services in large companies, hospitals, (schools), institutions, etc. He retired from the Slater System as VP and Director of Operations. Prior to joining the Jackson (Mississippi) Country Club, Riordan built and operated country clubs in Austin and Port Arthur, Texas. He was educated at Marquette University in Marquette, Wisconsin, and served as a flyer in World War I. He also served in WW II, ...working in the Lend Lease program, supplying America’s allies with war materials and other goods (including food).”* Riordan’s military records show service in the Navy during WW II, from May, 1942 to June, 1945. His title was Chief Commissary Steward, so his military experience evidently gave him a head start on his career with Slater System, Inc., after which he moved to the golf course/country club industry.

In the July 1972 issue of the newsletter Riordan wrote, *“We are very happy to announce the Building Committee has approved the design and plans for the new Recreation Building to be located in the Kingsdale Center....”* The architect was Aubrey Scott of Jonesboro, AR. Historian Gilbert Fite later reported that the cost for the building and furnishings reached just over \$611,000, of which Cooper contributed \$400,000.

The October 1973 issue of the POA newsletter states that at the opening of the new building, *“A motion was made...that the building be officially named ‘the Riordan Building,’ and an unanimous vote of the attending property owners was received.”* The plaque at the front of the building still says Riordan Building, but it shortly became known as Riordan Hall.

Riordan’s wife June predeceased him in 1977. He died in January, 1983, at the age of 83, leaving behind his son, Retired Colonel John B. Riordan, six grandsons and four great-grandchildren. He is buried in the US National Cemetery in Fayetteville, with a small headstone on his grave but a large building dedicated to him in the middle of Bella Vista.

Picture 1: John Riordan at his desk in 1968.



Picture 2: Honored as a veteran, Riordan was buried at the National Cemetery in Fayetteville.



Picture 3: Riordan Hall still looks good forty years after its completion.



Picture 4: This plaque is mounted on the front wall of the building.

