

HISTORY OF FERRIS HIGH SCHOOL

E. 3020 - 37th Avenue Spokane, WA 99223 Opened: 1963 Namesake: Joel E. Ferris

Joel E. Ferris High School is a four-year public high school in Spokane, Washington, part of Spokane Public Schools. In southeast Spokane, it was built at a cost of \$3,235,861 and opened on September 3, 1963. The school was named in 1961 for Joel E. Ferris, one of Spokane's leading citizens.

Long before there was a building or a name for the school, "The Ferris Story" had its beginning. Experiments with new teaching methods and scheduling formats were being carried on nationwide in the fifties and sixties. In Spokane, District No. 81 high schools were researching the new teaching methods as well. District personnel visited schools with the new teaching ideas already in use. By the time Joel E. Ferris High School became a reality, many contributions had come from inside District No. 81.

Internationally Known Early in its history, the faculty and district personnel developed an educational documentary film. Joel E. Ferris High School became known internationally for the team teaching and scheduling concepts it used. The title of the film was The Ferris Story. Planning began for a new senior high school on the south side of Spokane in the mid-fifties. It was 1959 before any action took place. First, architects Royal A. McClure and Thomas Adkison were selected. Finally, the site at 37th and Regal was decided and voted on by the board. Plans were made for a 1962 opening date but delayed by the state board of education. On April 13, 1961, a new opening date of 1963 was scheduled. At the same time a name for the new school was selected. Joel E. Ferris was the name unanimously agreed upon by the board. The school's Namesake, Joel E. Ferris, had been a well-known banker, civic leader, and local historian. He was the epitome of the lifelong learner. Ferris had combined his pastime interests in Northwest history and writing to yield a number of historical articles on Northwest history that had been published in the Spokesman-Review. Gardening, another hobby, prompted the Ferris family to provide a \$10,000 gift from the Ferris foundation for landscaping at the center courtyard of Joel E. Ferris High School. That landscaped courtyard was one of two gifts given the Ferris High School that added to the aesthetic plans for the campus-style school. The second gift was given by the building architects, Adkison and McClure. They commissioned local artist, Harold Balazs, to create three sculptures for the campus. Two hung in the stairwells of the humanities building, and the other stood in the courtyard of the science building. Ferris's buildings were planned aesthetically to provide a sense of quiet and a pleasant view for the students. Ferris was considered to be a bargain for District 81. Joel E. Ferris High School was also designed for economy and safety. The campus-style school had a final cost of \$3,235,861. Compared to the Shadle Park plant, completed six years previously at \$3.1 million, Ferris was considered a bargain with 211,000 square feet at \$15.26 per square foot. Shadle's 203,000 square feet, six years before, had cost the district \$15.02 per square foot. It was estimated that had Ferris been built as a single, four-story building, the price would have been \$2,400 per student. As a campus-style plan, Ferris cost \$1,600 per student. Nine buildings connected by covered walkways and the large hallways with several exits were considered fire safety features for the campus-

style buildings. Insurance for Ferris High School was the lowest in the district. On June 26, 1963, architects McClure and Adkison reported to the board that the Joel E. Ferris High School campus was complete. Innovation Is the Key Also in June 1963, the 36-member faculty and administration attended workshops on campus to prepare to teach in the new system. The workshops were taught by local and national educators familiar with the system that would come to be known by staff and students as the "Ferris system." Ferris High School was one of the first schools in the nation to be planned and designed to take advantage of years of experimenting with new teaching methods. On September 3, 1963, the first Joel E. Ferris High School students arrived for opening day. Ferris opened with Grades 8, 9, and 10 only. The first Friday enrollment was 794. Students entered a new school and began a new way of learning. Although confused in the beginning, the students soon caught on to the modular scheduling and thrived in the small classes. In 1989, the former Christine Donley recalled her schedule of 1965 for her daughter, now a student at Ferris. "Our schedules were the same on Mondays, Thursdays and Tuesdays/Fridays with homeroom 8:00-8:15. On Wednesdays, our schedules were different. We had homeroom from 8:00-9:30. This would be the day all our cons would be on." Ferris students' course requirements were no different from those of other District No. 81 high schools. At Ferris, however, each course was taught by a team of teachers. A team could consist of two to six teachers. Students had three methods of learning: large group lectures, small group seminars, and individual labs or study periods.

One student could be taught the same course by as many as three teachers. A transfer student made this comment to a teacher, "At Ferris, hours pass like minutes; at (my old) school, minutes pass like hours." Extracurricular activities were no different at Ferris than at other area high schools. Sports, music, and social organizations were available. During the first year, students voted the name "Saxons" for their nickname. "Saxons" won over "Alpiner." At the same time, they selected the school colors of scarlet and silver. By 1989 Ferris was only 26 years old and had had only four principals. Arthur A. Blauert, first principal, served from 1962 through 1967. He was selected a year before the opening date of Ferris to have time to study schools already using the new teaching methods and to select a faculty for the new school. In the fall of 1968, Herschel V. Lindsey took over the job of principal.

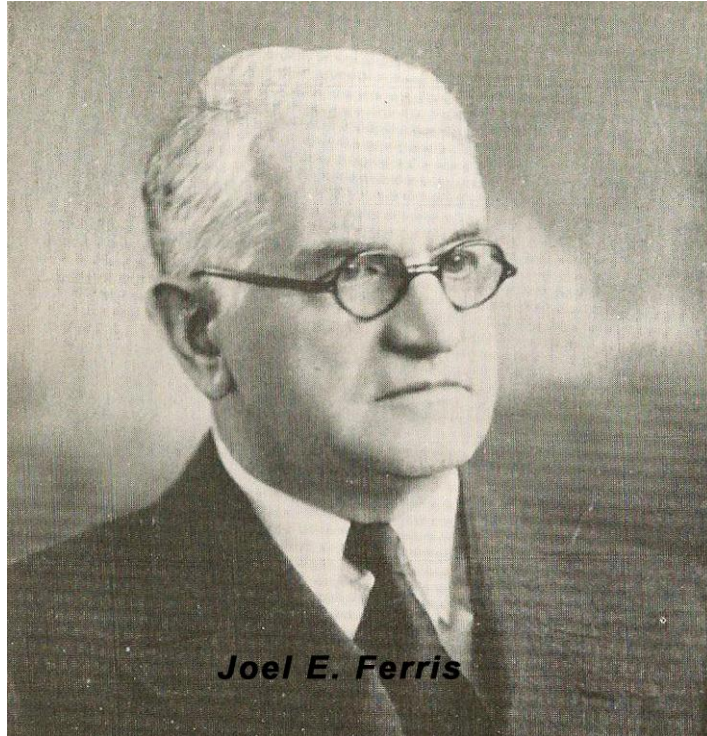
He retired in 1978. James R. Hutton was Ferris's third principal. He served from 1978 to 1985, when he was selected to be principal at Shadle Park High School. Jonathan W. Bentz became principal at Ferris in 1985. Joel E. Ferris High School was planned and designed as an innovative, educational experience. Changes in the "Ferris system" came slowly. Although Ferris has conformed to a traditional educational system, Jon Bentz, principal in 1989, sensed the same energy that made The Ferris Story possible in 1963 was still alive in 1989. He shared these thoughts with a student researcher. "Ferris High School is relatively young and full of energy, full of enthusiasm, striving to be the best that it can be. The energy that exists here, in the pursuit of excellence, is really heartwarming and overwhelming."

This article is an excerpt from:

First Class for 100 years
SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 81 1889-1 989

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Joel E. Ferris

Joel Edward Ferris
1874 - 1960