

SCHOOL



John O'Herron (left) and Eileen Lapington of Cardinal Newman Academy

## ACTING ON FAITH

Cardinal Newman Academy's founders seek to fill a niche in private education

**S**ometimes you just see a need and seek to fill it. That, by the way, does not guarantee anything. No matter how much preparation is done, eventually it may come down to a leap of faith. Which is how Cardinal Newman Academy got started.

Attorney John O'Herron, along with friends and associates, many of them with young children, started thinking in the fall of 2013 about an alternative to the region's current slate of Catholic schools. At the time, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond was considering opening a middle school in the old Benedictine building.

"I met people through that process who didn't like the prospects on the horizon for high school," recalls Cardinal Newman Academy's director Eileen

### WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU'D DO DIFFERENTLY?

During the three years of planning and holding meetings, "maybe we should've been working instead on recruiting and raising money." —John O'Herron, Cardinal Newman Academy board president

M. Lapington, a Medieval and Byzantine scholar and graduate of the University of Richmond, Catholic University of America and Brown University.

Following the tenets of English poet and theologian Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) for civil discourse, this ad hoc group coalesced around the idea of an affordable private Catholic high school. A survey of parents confirmed that the regional Catholic community desired another high school option with characteristics such as coeducation, small classes and group discussions, and an integrated curriculum that connects ideas in various classes.

Pulling from their own formative educational experiences and those they'd learned about, the Cardinal Newman group sought the best way to accomplish their goals.

"We talked to everybody," recalls O'Herron, a Warrenton native and University of Richmond graduate who became the new school's board president. Extensive due diligence that included meetings with present private school administrations, parents and community members went on through 2014, with a feasi-

### WHAT'S THE BEST DECISION YOU MADE?

"We conducted market research and collected all the data we could get. And like any entrepreneur, we got to question all the assumptions." —Eileen M. Lapington, Cardinal Newman Academy director

bility report issued in 2015.

"Many people we encountered liked the vision and the faith formation, but we didn't have a school," O'Herron says. Fundraising for an idea provided a substantial hurdle. Recruiting students, too, proved a challenge, because the institution did not yet exist. "We were running the risk of paralysis through analysis. At some point, you just got to take the leap of faith."

Enough money was raised to offset the difference between operating expenses and tuition revenue, and the school opened in 2017 on Patterson Avenue near Horsepen Road with two full-time students, as well as two students who took classes in a part-time designation. (Since then, plans surfaced for another private Catholic school: Cristo Rey Richmond High School is set to open in the former Benedictine space in the Museum District this August for the 2019-2020 academic year.)

Two years later, Cardinal Newman Academy has 10 students. Tuition for the 2019-2020 school year is set at \$8,750, with assistance available for those who demonstrate a financial need. —Harry Kollatz Jr.



Teacher Greg Tito works with freshman Isabella Siwko in science class.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: JAY PAUL