

Waubonsee Featured Alum Builds Legacy in Athletics

As a female high school student in the 1960s, Mary Lou Kunold primarily watched her beloved sports from the sidelines. Much progress has been made in the arena of women's sports since then, and Kunold has certainly been a part of it in her role as the Athletic Director at Rosary High School for more than 40 years. For her dedication and lasting legacy, Kunold is this month's Waubonsee Community College Student Success: Featured Alumnus.

After graduating from Waubonsee in 1971, Kunold continued her education earning her bachelor's degree in physical education from Aurora College (now Aurora University). Her first stop after college was where she remains today, as the Rosary High School Athletic Director.

Kunold said that as a high school student in the 1960s, all of her classes were based around accounting, shorthand and business in order to prepare her for the traditional secretarial roles that were the path of many young women at that time. However, Kunold loved sports, and physical education classes were her favorite. Encouraged by her teachers but unable to afford a four-year college, she enrolled at Waubonsee and lived at home, continuing to work as she pursued her degree.

Before Kunold's graduation from Madonna Catholic High School (now known as Aurora Central), her principal told her he wanted her to finish college and return to the high school to teach. When she was nearing the completion of her degree, Aurora Central didn't have an open position so the principal called Rosary to recommend her for a job there. Thanks to that phone call, Kunold was hired before she even finished college.

"I was only a few years older than the students at Rosary when I was hired," she said. And since Title IX, the law that banned discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities, went into effect during Kunold's early on-the-job years, she essentially got to build Rosary's athletics programs from the ground up.

When Kunold arrived, Rosary offered no sports. "The girls just played intramural sports in their school, that's all there was," she said.

Much has changed since then: Today 82 percent of the school's students play sports, while maintaining an average GPA of 3.39. Rosary's full complement of athletic programs includes cross country, basketball, golf, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball, along with a dance team and cheerleading squad. On average, Rosary has at least 10 athletes each year sign letters of intent for Division I schools. The swim team has earned six state titles.

Kunold said she credits the support of her own educators along the way with encouraging her to pursue a career that wasn't traditional for women at the time, and she's proud to have been part of the success of so many female student athletes during her years at Rosary.

Clearly, Kunold was a vital part of the exponential growth of women's sport in the Rosary High School Athletic Department, but she remains humble. "We got to where we are at because I have a great staff."

