

Former UW Oshkosh swim coach, educator passes away

by Kennan Timm - Monday, August 05, 2013

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Janet Moldenhauer, one of the pioneers in the development of women's athletics at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, passed away on July 29 in Ahmic Harbour, Ontario, Canada, following a short illness.

Moldenhauer, who celebrated her 83rd birthday just three days earlier, taught and coached at UW Oshkosh for 29 years. She coached women's swimming and diving from 1964-93 and men's swimming and diving from 1979-93. Moldenhauer also instructed sailing, canoeing, aqua aerobics, cross country skiing, biking and camping classes during her tenure at UW Oshkosh.

During the 1963-64 school year, women's swimming and diving at UW Oshkosh took off and Moldenhauer was the person selected to take the program to unchartered territory. The team practiced in a five-lane, 25-yard pool in Albee Hall and competed against schools throughout the Midwest.

Soon after Moldenhauer started coaching, Alison "Candy" Neuman joined the team. Neuman was an exceptional swimmer and later became the first female to represent UW Oshkosh at a national swimming and diving meet.

In 1971, the Wisconsin Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WWIAC) was established. Moldenhauer coached five conference champions over the next 23 years, including three-time winner Sandy Karow and two-time winner Connie Spaeth. In 1982, Spaeth finished fifth in the 50-yard backstroke at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III Championship to become UW Oshkosh's first All-American. Her performance helped the Titans to a 30th-place finish.

Moldenhauer replaced Jim Davies as head men's swimming and diving coach in 1979. She mentored a pair of two-time Wisconsin State University Conference (WSUC) champions in Paul Harris and Tom Huebner. Harris, a four-time All-American, won the 50-yard freestyle at the 1984 NCAA Division III Championship to become UW Oshkosh's first national champion. Moldenhauer and her Titans finished 18th at the NCAA Division III Championship in 1985, 27th in 1984, 28th in 1989 and 32nd in 1988.

Most of Moldenhauer's attention during her last two years as coach was directed toward a new pool in Albee Hall. Through the hard work of Moldenhauer and others, the \$2.2 million facility became a reality and opened in 1993.

Since her retirement from coaching and teaching, Moldenhauer was a regular spectator at UW Oshkosh sporting events. She also remained active in several fundraising events for the school's athletics department, including the Final Four Extravaganza Party.

In the community, Moldenhauer was active with the Fox Valley Sierra Club, Winnebago Audubon Society, Women of Winnebago, St. Andrews Evangelical Lutheran Church and Trout Unlimited. In 2008,

Moldenhauer was the recipient of the Fox Valley Sierra Group's Environmental Award. In 2006, Moldenhauer went to Washington, D.C., as a volunteer lobbyist for the Alaskan Wilderness Coalition. Her focus was to tell congressional representatives why it's important to protect Alaska and its rainforest.

Moldenhauer was born on July 26, 1930, in Milwaukee to Viola and Walter Moldenhauer. Following graduation from Milwaukee Rufus King High School, Moldenhauer attended the University of Illinois. It was at Illinois where she was introduced to coaching, teaching and volunteering.

After graduating in 1953, Moldenhauer worked at the University of Illinois Navy Pier in Chicago. Her volunteer work included water safety and first aid courses for the Chicago Area Red Cross.

Moldenhauer left Chicago in 1955 for Culver-Stockton College (Mo.), where she began her coaching career in men's tennis. Her three-year stay also included singing in the chorus, acting on stage, putting on dance recitals and appearing on local television.

Moldenhauer looked to further her education by attending Southern Illinois University. After earning her master's degree from the school in 1959, Moldenhauer traveled to Ohio University for a teaching position in first aid and water safety. She also coached synchronized swimming, with several of her teams qualifying for national competition.

During her time at Ohio University, Moldenhauer became a member of the summer staff at Camp Tevya, a Jewish cultural camp for children in Brookline, N.H., and Camp Maccabee, a Jewish camp for children in Pelican Lake, Wis. Her 17 years at the camps were devoted to teaching first aid, water safety and sailing.

After Camp Maccabee closed in 1969, Moldenhauer went to Canada to spend her summers teaching gymnastics, tennis, swimming, diving and sailing at Camp Ak-O-Mak, a competitive sports camp for girls in Ahmic Harbour, Ontario. Moldenhauer volunteered at the camp every summer since 1972, and it was her wish to spend her last days enjoying the beautiful view of Ahmic Lake.

"This is very sad news for all of us connected with UW-Oshkosh athletics," said Director of Athletics Darryl Sims. "Jan's enthusiasm and passion for what she believed in will be missed, not only here at UW-Oshkosh, but in the Oshkosh community and at Camp Ak-O-Mak. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Moldenhauer family."

A memorial service in Moldenhauer's honor will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 15 at St. Andrews Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oshkosh, 1100 E. Murdock Avenue, Oshkosh.