

[2019 FOUNDERS' DAY AWARD CITATION]

**Kathy Nutt Nekton** — Your selfless dedication to what you humbly call “ordinary human work” has had an extraordinary impact. As a beloved coach and physical education instructor for 35 years, you helped generations of Exonians become their best selves — athletically, academically and morally. You championed the connection between the body and the mind for adolescent health long before modern science proved your theories correct, and were a courageous voice for equality during Exeter’s burgeoning years of coeducation. Colleagues say you practically wrote the story of women’s sports at the Academy.

While diversity and inclusion were not commonplace terms when you were growing up during the 1950s, those ideals permeated your childhood. You were raised on liberal college campuses where your father served as a Methodist chaplain and your mother was an English instructor. By example, your parents taught you and your siblings to make a difference, in small or big ways, whenever you could. You vividly recollect your dad’s fervent support of the civil rights movement, and the two summers you spent as a teen volunteering at a work camp in Puerto Rico.

In 1966, you headed off to Penn State University to study physical education. There, you were an inaugural member of the first women’s swim team, borrowing sweats from the men’s team and planning your workouts during recreation time. Classes in kinesiology and anatomy offered your first glimpses into the mind-body synergy that would later inform much of your career. After graduation, you accepted a post at Smith College, teaching horseback riding, a lifelong passion, and fencing — a sport you knew nothing about, but quickly picked up, as you did with all of your athletic endeavors — ultimately earning a master’s degree in physical education.

A serendipitous encounter with then-Athletic Director Ted Seabrooke in Exeter, New Hampshire, landed you your first position at the Academy as a part-time coach for girls club basketball. Just months later, in the fall of 1973, you were hired as a full-time instructor in physical education. Of course, the job became much more than teaching the fundamentals of sports.

You had arrived at a boys school in transition. The first 39 females were admitted to Exeter in the fall of 1970. It was a time in the Academy's history, and the nation's, in which women and girls had little representation. Title IX legislation, calling for equal opportunities for both sexes, had just been signed into law in 1972. By the late 1970s, there were two girls dorms, one on each side of campus, "islands in a sea of boys."

You worked steadily, and from the start, to level the playing field. Programmatic choices weren't made intentionally to limit girls, but the facilities did. The newly built Love Gym, for example, didn't include girls locker rooms. As a field hockey, lacrosse and swim coach, you fought for equitable space for your teams to practice, change and compete. Your knack for offering an alternative perspective without negating another was appreciated. You settled into your new home, marrying fellow Physical Education Instructor Roger Nekton in 1977. Through it all, you made positive changes, such as instituting the first coed team practices, training female swimmers alongside their male counterparts. What began as a practical solution to negotiate limited pool time became a learning opportunity for both girls and boys about appreciating everyone as an athlete.

Your collaborative approach and open-minded spirit allowed you to impact athletes and non-athletes alike. As a fully invested faculty member — winning the Rupert Radford Faculty Fellowship Award a record three times — you served on Academy-wide committees related to admissions, discipline, curricular review, hiring and the selection of the 14th principal. By being a voice in areas of the school that were historically reserved for academic faculty, you advanced the understanding that physical activity serves children intellectually, developmentally and physiologically. "Kathy's ego is so beautifully in proportion to her humanity," says one former colleague, "that it never governs over." Your leadership skills were recognized regionally as well: In 1990, you were elected president of the New England Preparatory School Athletic Council, the first woman ever to hold this position.

Kathy, your genuine interest in those around you left students, fellow coaches and colleagues feeling inspired and cared for. You can name each girl in a team picture of the very first group you coached and scores of other team photos. When you coached the Academy's first transgender student and mentored others who were just coming out, you made them "feel at ease, at home." It is a tribute to your influence that many of your former students went on to

become leaders in their fields and volunteers for their alma mater, including at least five trustees. As one colleague says: “Kathy let young girls and young women know that they could do anything they wanted; that they could rise into spaces historically reserved for men; and that they could do so by trusting their intellect, their idiosyncrasies, their integrity.”

Lifting others up is your life’s work and it continues to define you today. As one of Exeter’s most distinguished, respected and beloved faculty members, it is our great pleasure to present you with the 2019 Founders’ Day Award.