



“My biggest victories are having a person who never played competitively before come out for a team [and gain a] positive self-image.”



Farewell, Mary

When Mary LeVine arrived on campus in 1985, Sarah Lawrence students and faculty were not the health-conscious set they are today. In Bates Dining Room, students ate their meals among clouds of cigarette smoke, often wishing aloud that they could get PE credit for walking up the hill after dinner. The athletics program occupied a cramped office in Bates, but the idea of building a sports center was controversial. Some members of the community considered an athletics center pointless and even a detriment to the College's reputation as a serious center of learning.

At that time, there were few competitive sports teams. In order to fulfill their PE requirement, students chose from classes like bowling and tai chi, most of which were held in the undersized gym in Bates, or off campus at a neighboring college or municipal facility.

And then Mary LeVine arrived. By her retirement in June 2010, the new director of physical education had transformed the College's mindset regarding fitness.

LeVine firmly believed that students engaged in rigorous academics need a physical outlet, and that a good athletics program complements rather than competes with academic work. She offered basic, non-threatening fitness classes to help students discover how good it feels to work out. When students returning from a junior year at Oxford asked LeVine to start a crew team, she made it happen.

By 1990, responding to student demand, LeVine had added more fencing classes and created teams for volleyball and men's and women's tennis. Under her guidance, the College joined the Hudson Valley Women's Athletic Conference and began to compete against other colleges in the area. She later helped found the Hudson Valley Men's Athletic Conference.

All told, during LeVine's 25-year tenure at the College, she doubled the physical education offerings and added 12 intercollegiate teams.

LeVine also began pushing for the construction of a new sports center. The athletics

program moved to the Caspar Whitney Fitness Center, in Rothschild, in 1994; two years later, over 500 students and 100 faculty and staff had participated in the center's orientation. And by that time, \$2.9 million had been raised for the Campbell Sports Center, which opened in 1998. The new facility was instantly popular with students, faculty, and staff. Some of its original detractors became daily users of the pool and workout room.

In addition, LeVine renovated the tennis courts and built the softball facility behind Marshall Field.

LeVine also served as a teacher and coach, and her door was always open to students. Over the years, she taught a variety of PE classes, including golf, archery, and basketball. She also coached women's softball and, for a time, men's and women's tennis. She loved working with students, telling the campus paper that “Getting back into coaching and doing softball ... was probably the most fun I've had in 25 years.”

She spent endless weekend and evening hours driving all over Westchester and New Jersey to watch the athletic teams compete, and her moral support was known to help a discouraged athlete turn around a match or game.

But winning was never the point. As LeVine explained to a local newspaper 20 years ago, “My biggest victories are having a person who never played competitively before come out for a team [and gain a] positive self-image.” To LeVine, athletics were a path to personal growth.

Mary LeVine's positive, welcoming approach to physical fitness changed the way a generation of SLC students felt about sports. She may have moved to Florida, but she'll never leave SLC: at her retirement party, President Lawrence announced that the College would name the softball field Mary LeVine Field in her honor. The new sign will be installed in the spring. 🌞

—Gillian Gilman Culff '88

TOP: LEVINE WITH THE WOMEN'S TENNIS TEAM, OCTOBER 1990; MIDDLE: AT THE FIELD TO BE NAMED IN HER HONOR, 2010 (PHOTO BY DON HAMERMAN); BOTTOM: AT SOFTBALL PRACTICE, CIRCA 2000.