



Serve: Milligan

Advantage: Findlay

Because of her pioneering efforts in athletics at Findlay, a woman's place is on the court, the track or the playing field.

By Charlene Hankinson

Looking out of her office window in Croy Physical Education Center, Sharon Milligan, associate professor of physical education, has a bird's-eye view of the lawn in front of Old Main. As the seasons change she has enjoyed watching the kaleidoscope of color as the landscaping evolves from tulips to geraniums to mums.

Having arrived at Findlay College in 1967, Milligan recalls a time when such floral highlights didn't adorn the campus and neither were there many opportunities for women's athletics. She

originally intended to teach physical education at Findlay for two years before moving on, but the construction of Croy Physical Education Center in 1969 enticed her to stay. Before she knew it, two years turned into 42.

In addition to teaching, Milligan soon found herself as the sole coach for women's sports – volleyball, basketball and softball. She started the first girls' field hockey team and the first women's tennis team. One year she was the track coach and another she served as the cheerleading adviser.

In the late 1960s, before Title IX in 1972 mandated equality for women in education, women's sports at Findlay College, like most colleges, were unfunded. The women held fund-raisers and worked the concession stand at football games to make money for the teams. At times, mothers made the girls' uniforms. Athletic contests were collegial affairs, with both teams sharing punch and cookies afterward, she remembered. Milligan noted that she hasn't coached since the early 1980s, so she has not been a part

of the women's intercollegiate athletic program that is now so much larger and more competitive.

Milligan discovered athletics at Otterbein College where she played on several teams and learned sports such as canoeing, golf, tennis and downhill skiing. She found the new activities exciting and added physical education to Spanish and elementary education majors. After graduating in 1965, she went on to earn a M.Ed. in physical education from Ohio University in 1967. In turn, Milligan brought new activities classes to Findlay. Over the years, she has taught archery, tennis, self-defense, badminton, folk dancing, cross country skiing, sailing, bicycling, canoeing, backpacking and others.

A nine-month teaching contract left Milligan free to spend her summers hiking and bicycling across the United States. She hiked the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, completing it in 1980, and bicycled the 4,250-mile Trans America Bicycle Trail from Oregon to Virginia, completing it in 1982. In addition, she hiked from the Mexican border to Canada on the Pacific Crest Trail in 1987. She also hiked the Inca Trail in Peru and trekked in Nepal to the first base camp of Mt. Everest.

Milligan, who serves as director of the health and physical education program, said that staying in touch with 18- to 21-year-olds helps her keep a young outlook. She has maintained long-lasting ties with former students Rosaline "Roady" Morgan '71 and Eileen Kleinfelter '79. Morgan, who went on to a career in middle and high school teaching and coaching, was honored as National Middle School Physical Education Teacher of the Year in 2001 and was named a Distinguished Alumna at The University of Findlay in 2006. Kleinfelter coached women's basketball at the collegiate level, including seven seasons at The University of Findlay from 1994-2001, and was named to the UF Athletic Hall of Fame in 2004.

In addition, Milligan has regular contact with many of her former students who are now physical education teachers and coaches in area school systems. These alumni are now mentoring student teachers from The University of Findlay. "It is fun to go out and see our (former) students, working with them in a different capacity to help our current students out," she said.

Among her many happy memories are leading backpacking class trips to the Smoky Mountains and Grand Canyon National Park and joining University-sponsored trips to the Holy Land, Mexico, Japan and eastern Europe. She also has relished attending sports events and theater and musical productions, calling campus life "a very enriching environment."

A lifelong resident of Fostoria, Milligan serves as mission chairperson and on the administrative board at High Street United Methodist Church in Fostoria. She was honored, along with her brother and her mother, as the Fostoria Family of the Year in 1995 by the Fostoria Ministerial Association and Fostoria Family Services. In gratitude for the help their mother received with Meals on Wheels during an 11-year illness, Milligan and her brother, Frank, have served as volunteers for more than 10 years after their mother's death. For their efforts, they were named Community Heroes in 2004, but Milligan simply called it "paying back."

Milligan's teaching and coaching efforts also have been recognized. She received the Founders' Academic Excellence Award for Faculty in 1992, and she was inducted into the UF Athletic Hall of Fame in 1995 for her role in pioneering women's athletics.

Milligan has decided to teach one more year before retiring. Now, she'll have one more chance to view the changing seasons and to prepare another class of students to teach and enjoy the many variations of physical activities.



In one of her early roles in promoting women's athletics at Findlay, Milligan served as coach of the Oiler women's volleyball team.



Milligan and former student Rosaline "Roady" Morgan '71, enjoying a Homecoming game reunion in 2006.