



### **Bonnie Butsch: There for the Pleasure of the Performer**

Current Connecticut Co-SJD Bonnie Butsch has spent the last five decades in gymnastics as a competitor, judge and coach. It was Chickie Poison, a fellow women's field hockey official, however, who spoke the words that most influenced Bonnie. "She said that officials are there for the pleasure of the performer," Bonnie recalls. "It's all about the gymnasts, not us."

Bonnie began her gymnastics career in East Lyme's Junior High School, where two physical education teachers—who knew little about the sport at the time—began a gymnastics club in the mid 60's. "We were a small but mighty group of kids who loved gymnastics," she says. Since East Lyme did not have a high school, Bonnie and her friends worked out at the same club at the Junior High until they had learned enough to compete in AAU meets in nearby Connecticut towns such as Milford, Guilford and West Hartford. Bonnie notes, "Muriel Grossfeld actually judged our AAU meets!"

Bonnie packed off to Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois for two years prior to getting married and having her first child. "The physical education department asked *me* to teach gymnastics, as they did not know too much about the sport." She also worked part time at the Parks and Recreation Department in St. Charles, Illinois. After moving back East, Bonnie finished her BS degree in Physical Education, Health and Recreation at Southern Connecticut University in New Haven and began teaching in public schools.

The next years were spent having three more children, which led to a break in her teaching career. In the early 1970's, Bonnie was recruited to take a judges' course taught at Southern by Joan Hicks and Sharon Valley, who were both coaches at Muriel's gym in New Haven. She tested well enough to earn an Associate rating. "You were awarded a rating based on your test score," she explains. "I didn't think I would ever judge, but by then high school gymnastics had begun, and I was being asked to judge meets. My friend, a fairly new judge herself, told me to get a piece of paper, put "M" for Medium on one side and "S" for Superior on the other, and to make a checkmark for every skill I saw!"

Bonnie joined NAWGJ when it formed in 1974. She also bought the royal blue uniform, which she knows she still has *somewhere* in one of her closets! She was elected to the NAWGJ Connecticut State Governing Board, serving as the high school liaison. Soon, State-rated Bonnie started spending her winter weekends driving to meets, which was a nice break for a mother of four young children. "My friends couldn't understand what judging was all about or why I was traveling around, sometimes in bad winter weather." The judges had fun, too – once, at a stop at McDonalds in their royal blue uniforms, the McDonald's cashier asked them what NAWGJ stood for. Without blinking an eye one of the judges responded, "Oh, it stands for the National Airlines of West Germany and Japan!"

When Bonnie resumed her teaching career, she added two masters degrees to her accomplishments, one in School Health and the other in Educational Leadership. She eventually became a department head and then a school administrator, retiring in 2009. During this busy time, Bonnie achieved her National rating and has

been honored to judge at the Regional level in addition to many invitationals. She served as the Connecticut State Judging Director for four years in the mid-90's and attended several NAWGJ Symposiums, east coast to west coast. She plans to go to the 2019 Symposium in Ft. Worth, Texas. These days, she especially enjoys judging college meets, as well as coaching part time.

Bonnie would like to keep judging as long as she can. "The SJD job is a lot of work, but I have a great Co-SJD, Theresa Nolan, and a hard working State Governing Board. Gymnastics is one of the most beautiful sports on the planet. I feel very fortunate to be actively involved in the gymnastics community."



**Connecticut Co-SJD's Theresa Nolan and Bonnie Butsch**