



Carole Liedtke
Judging Thoroughbred

When veteran Kentucky judge Carole Liedtke found out that her XCEL Regionals volunteer assignment in Lexington would conflict with the Kentucky Derby celebrations in Louisville, she packed her Derby hat so she could wear it at the meet!

Since 1960, Carole has amassed a trophy case full of accolades and awards in gymnastics, running and golf, including those from the University of Louisville, the city of Louisville, the YMCA, NAWGJ, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association, and USAG.

Her career began as a dancer (tap, acrobatics and jazz), but a Scandinavian PE teacher at Pleasure Ridge Park High School in Louisville began the first women's high school gymnastics program in Kentucky. Boys' equipment was retro-fitted, and the team, which Carole joined, competed in Indiana and even Canada. When Muriel Davis (Grossfeld) came to do a clinic shortly after the 1960 Olympics, "she opened everyone's eyes and motivated people to start gymnastics."

There was no gymnastics yet at the University of Louisville, where Carole received her B.S. in Health, Physical Education and Biology (she received her M.A. in Physical Education at Western Kentucky University in 1970), so she continued to dance, even touring armed forces bases in the US and the Caribbean with a USO-type troupe. Later, though, she competed for the college while also competing for the Louisville Gymnastics Club.

In 1965, every team had to bring two judges. "They handed me a rule book," she laughs, "and I judged. I would judge the juniors in the morning and then compete in the evening—sometimes near midnight!" She even competed in a couple of meets after marrying her college beau, Joe. "We met at a dance," she says, "and we're still dancing 52 years later."

Carole started teaching at Moore High School and also coached the gymnastics team, which won the State meet several times. She also coached the University of Louisville team, one of three college teams in Kentucky at the time, winning Regionals and qualifying for Nationals many years.

As Carole and Joe settled into married life and began their family, her judging career took off. She took the National judges test and as well as the FIG Course in 1972, where the judges took oral tests and judged live gymnasts. Carole traveled internationally for many years, judging in Africa, China, Belgium, England, Holland, Italy, Puerto Rico, Sweden, France and Canada. "Every meet was different," she muses. "At the Student World Games in England, everyone marched in like the Olympics, and we used little telephones to call in our scores. In France we judged the whole meet sitting in one section of the stands. In China, I was just glad I had brought my peanut butter!"

Carole joined NAWGJ in 1974, and after serving many years in Region V USAG roles, she was elected as the Kentucky SJD in 1985. She moved up to RJD in 1995, retiring from the National Governing Board in 2007. Carole is famous for bringing bags of goodies for her SJD's to the NAWGJ meetings each year. "I tried to make the SJD's feel important and respected. I wanted them to feel that they were doing the best they could with their State's judges." Carole is currently on the Kentucky NAWGJ State Board.

She also volunteered in Atlanta in 1996. "It was a highlight to work on the floor. I had made it to the Olympics!" she laughs. She also attended the Munich and Montreal Olympics.

After coaching at the University of Louisville until 1982, when the program was dropped, Carole converted their barn into “Barnastics” and for several years trained gymnasts and cheerleaders and ran a dance studio. She was also busy tending to three children. Many of her students along the way have become coaches and judges, including her daughter, Tiffany. “We’ve had some reunions, and hopefully I motivated them in their gymnastics. Now we’re seeing their children in the sport!”

Carole became a USA-Brevet judge in 2006 and has continued to organize and run many Kentucky state and regional clinics and symposiums. She has also attended most of the NAWGJ Symposiums. “National Congresses are great, but there isn’t the same camaraderie.”

These days, Carole and Joe stay busy with their seven grandchildren and volunteer at the local YMCA, library, church, golf league, local police academy and church thrift shop. Her love of adventure and travel has led her to hot air ballooning, skydiving, scuba diving, golfing, ballroom dancing, cruising, and zip lining.

And yet, she still finds time to judge. “I enjoy getting together with judges,” she says, “even to study for tests.” She tries to provide guidance without being too much in control, and reminds them about the importance of professionalism, as past experience makes a difference. “And I remind the younger judges to let me know if I make a mistake, but they tend to not want to say anything to me!”

Next May, when she’s not judging or volunteering, Carole will be back in Louisville, wearing her Derby hat, eating Derby pie and sipping a mint julep—minus the bourbon! The gymnasts are never far from her thoughts: “Keep the gymnasts and their hard work in mind when you are giving your scores. Be consistent and fair to all.”



Carole coaching Louisville Moore High School gymnastics team.



Royal Blue at a meet in the 1980's. Carole is standing.



Carole & her Region 5 SJD's: Georgette Dupke, Carol Arnaut, Jeanne Johnson, Judy Kemp, & Nancy Barley SJD Workshop, late 1990's



Carole with Yvonne Hodge & Carolyn Bowers Italy, 1998



Carole, in Derby wear, hangs out with former KY SJD, Michael Crowe, Region 5 Xcel Regionals 2019