

UMassAmherst <http://www.umass.edu/newsoffice/article/obituary-kirsti-kitty-kjeldsen-former-womens-gymnastics-coach>

Obituary: Kirsti "Kitty" Kjeldsen, former women's gymnastics coach

January 13, 2005

Kirsti "Kitty" (Virkhaus) Kjeldsen, 74, of West Ossipee, N.H., a former Women's Physical Education teacher and the campus's first women's gymnastics coach, died Dec. 27 of cancer.

Born in Tartu, Estonia, her early years growing up were cut short by World War II, which forced the family to flee to Germany, where they lived as refugees. At the end of the war, as the Russian army approached, she and her family walked to freedom in the American Zone of Czechoslovakia.

Her family immigrated in 1949 to the United States, settling in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. In 1955, she was the New England floor exercise champion. She received a bachelor's degree in physical education from Springfield College, where she started its women's gymnastics team.

After coaching women's gymnastics at the high school level and organizing the first clinic for gymnasts, coaches and judges in the Northeast, she joined the Women's Physical Education Department in 1962 as a part-time instructor. She taught in the department until 1974 and also served as a graduate teaching assistant from 1975-79.

She established the campus's women's gymnastics program and brought it to national prominence as her team finished fourth in the U.S. in 1968 and first in country in 1972.

She rose to the level of an international gymnastics judge when there were only 15 in the country, and was the founding president of the Women's National Gymnastics Judges Association. She also gave color commentary for televised gymnastics competitions for ESPN.

She leaves her husband of 17 years, Edwin R. More; her former husband, professor emeritus Erik K. M. Kjeldsen, of Amherst; a son, Frederik C. M. Kjeldsen, of Hyde Park, N.Y.; a daughter, Deena K. Durant, of Suffield, Conn.; a brother, and grandchildren.