

Distinguished Alumna in PESH
Gwendolyn Binnicker '55



Gwendolyn Thacker Binnicker is from Norway, South Carolina, a 1955 graduate of Winthrop College with a degree in Physical Education, and “proud to be 81 years young!” Words cannot express the feelings of gratitude and honor she has as we recognize her as one of Winthrop University’s distinguished alumni. She truly represents the Winthrop name in a perfect manner and has had an outstanding career as a physical educator and coach. Not one to take any credit for her many accomplishments, she would rather say “I have been so blessed and honored in my professional career.”

Gwen attended Newberry Willow High School and enrolled at Winthrop College in 1951. Before she graduated, she proved to be one of the most active and involved students the halls of Peabody Gymnasium have ever seen. While a physical education major at Winthrop, Gwen was president of Sigma Gamma Nu, president of the Winthrop Recreation Association, and a member of the Winthrop Dance Club. As a junior, she coached her first basketball team at St. John’s Methodist Church in Rock Hill. This proved to be the beginnings of an outstanding and successful coaching career that lasted for thirty-eight years. Gwen began her professional career in 1955 as a teacher and coach at Alexander Graham JHS in Charlotte, North Carolina. Two years later she moved to Spaugh JHS in Charlotte and spent six years coaching eleven championship teams in volleyball, softball, and track and field. Despite her tremendous success at Spaugh, Gwen declared that “it was not my coaching; it was the hard-working and respectful students that deserved all of the credit.” A mentality that Gwen instilled in her students was what she called her main motivation for playing sports. “Back then, it didn’t matter who won or lost; it was just fun playing!” What a refreshing and proper attitude to impart to her athletes!

After her successful stint in North Carolina, Gwen moved to Orangeburg, South Carolina where she spent the next thirty years teaching and coaching in the public school system. At Thaxton JHS, Gwen taught physical education and coached basketball and track and field. During one year of coaching track in the Junior Olympics, she took eighteen girls to the state competition, and they returned with sixteen gold medals! She finished her career at Orangeburg High School teaching Physical Education and Safety and coaching the cheerleading teams.

Our faculty was informed that Gwen has won numerous teaching and coaching honors and coached many championship teams. But instead of giving us this information, she wanted all of us to know that she “has always been at the right place at the right time.”

Gwen and her husband Bill have been instrumental in establishing a museum and welcome center in Norway, and she is a member of the Puritan Club, the Matron’s Club, St. John’s Methodist Church and president of her book club. But Gwen will be remembered by many for the love and kindness she gave as she mentored so many young men and women. It is with great honor that we the faculty and staff, welcome Gwen Thacker Binnicker as a member of the Class of 2014 Distinguished Alumni.