

Mason Forensics Team Founder Dies

April 14, 2009

Shortly before the Mason Forensics Team earned second place at the prestigious American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament on April 5, the team's original founder, Margaret Cain Duffner, died at the age of 90.

Duffner taught speech for Mason's English Department in the late 1960s through 1975 and founded the Forensics Team in 1971. In 1975, Duffner and her husband moved to Marco Island, Fla., where she lived until her death on March 26.



Margaret Cain Duffner with Bruce Manchester, who succeeded her as Forensics Team director, at a 2001 Forensics reunion. Manchester, Professor Emeritus of Communication, retired in 2004.

Photo courtesy of Katherine Rowan

Katherine Rowan, BA English '75, professor and associate chair of Mason's Department of Communication, was one of Duffner's students and a member of the Forensics Team from 1972 to 1975. Rowan calls Duffner "one of the best Mason faculty ever."

Rowan and her younger brother Mike Rowan, BA English '78, who also joined the Forensics Team, became lifelong friends of Duffner.

Mike Rowan, now a senior producer/director with WSRE-TV, PBS for the Gulf Coast (Pensacola, Fla.), wrote a tribute about Duffner after her death.

In it he said, "She was that rare individual who, through a combination of expertise, drive and charisma, could make a student produce at the highest possible level. Being an 18-year-old kid, I was also drawn by the feeling of sophistication and sense of professionalism that came with being a member of the Duffner squad."

Noting that the Forensics Team had been outstanding from its very beginning, Rowan added, "The fact that GMU Forensics has its own Alumni Chapter is evidence that the team has developed a rich sense of identity and tradition during its nearly 30-year history. Just as the team owes its origin to Margaret Duffner, I believe it's fair to say she also provided the core elements of that sense of identity and tradition. As etched in the words on the award that bears her name, her commitment to 'excellence in forensics' was what started the winning tradition that gave the team — and the university — the identity it enjoys to this day."



Margaret Cain Duffner is shown with members of the Forensics Team and their trophies in a photo from the 1973 Advocate yearbook. The president of the university at the time, Loren Thompson, is at center.

Photo courtesy of Katherine Rowan

According to a biography on Xlibris.com, publisher of her book, "One Green Leaf: An Interpretive Family History," Duffner held a BA degree from MacMurray College and an MA degree from Northwestern University. She and her husband, John, were married for more than 60 years and had six children. Her writings have appeared in popular periodicals and professional journals.

Duffner's remains will be interred with those of her late husband at Arlington National Cemetery; a date for burial has not yet been set.

Duffner's memory can be honored either by considering her hospice care center, [Avow Hospice](#) of Naples, Fla., or one of her two favorite charities: [Guadalupe Center of Immokalee](#) (Florida) or [St. Joseph's Indian School](#), Chamberlain, S.D.

Thanks to Katherine Rowan and Mike Rowan for providing this information.

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