



**CONNIE SANTANIELLO AMIDON SOWARDS**  
**Class of 1963**

The 2020 inductee to the Mynderse Academy Athletic Hall of Fame is Connie Sowards. Connie was extremely active in sports and athletics prior to the inception of Title IX in 1972. While interscholastic athletic opportunities for girls were limited prior to that date, she and her classmates enjoyed intramurals and pick-up games outside of school hours and took every opportunity to play softball, basketball, and participate in gymnastics. Connie credits several adults who encouraged, supported, and nurtured her while serving as role models during these early years—Hazel Reynolds, Diana Panucci, Angie Bantuvanis, and Tony Petrocci—among others. During her elementary school years, Connie participated in a gymnastics program where she and others received instruction from high school students and Mynderse Academy physical education staff. After learning tumbling and precision routines, Connie and the others went to several schools and performed their skills. At the same time, Connie attended an aerobics class at the Luchessi Dance Studio.

Most of Connie's athletic accomplishments were achieved after she graduated from Mynderse. She played recreation softball on several teams in the area and participated in many tournaments and leagues outside of Seneca Falls. She also gave swimming lessons at Cayuga Lake, the Geneva YMCA, the New York Chiropractic College, and at private pools.

Later in life, Connie and husband Jim Amidon gave back to her school and community by coaching youth teams, chaperoning, managing and manning concession stands, transporting kids to sporting activities, and attending games as a fan regardless of the involvement of their own children. Much of the couple's free time was spent at ball fields teaching rules and skills to many children who lacked other opportunities. In addition, it was not unusual for Connie and Jim to organize pick-up games at the ball fields so the girls could practice these skills. Many of these girls went on to join recreation center teams and play weekly and then later went on to play Mynderse softball during their high school years.

Connie and Jim were active in the Seneca Falls Recreation program playing an important part in ensuring girls, as well as boys, had every opportunity to learn various sports. Working with Community Recreation Director Tony Petroccia, they worked diligently to give young people opportunities to play, not only locally but against other schools and recreation centers. Tony, Connie, Jim, and many others worked hundreds of volunteer hours with the only compensation knowing they helped boys and girls learn safe, fun, healthy activities and good sportsmanship. Connie and Jim volunteered to coach and chaperone softball, little league, and swimming for the Friendship Games at various locations inside and outside the area for many years.

Connie always felt that coaching, volunteering at the concession stand, and assisting wherever needed helped her become an excellent role model for the young people involved in the programs. She was able to show how they could be helpful and have fun without expecting compensation. Her example trickled down and many of the local athletes, including her own children, have carried on the legacy of volunteering in the Community Center programs. Connie feels that she personally benefited greatly from being able to participate in pre-Title IX limited athletics. But, more importantly, it set the stage for her and many of her peers to pursue athletic endeavors after graduation and give back to their school and community.