



JoAnn Francis Maher

October 30, 1932 - June 15, 2012

JoAnn Francis Maher, who as a Toledo Public schools athletics administrator during the 1970's and 1980's guided the development of girls' sports and advocated for equal participation and championship opportunities at the local and state levels, died Dec. 16, 2011 at her home in Parrish, Florida. She was 79. She died of lung cancer diagnosed in May that, although apparently in remission as recently as October, spread to her liver and bones, James E. Maher, her husband of nearly 60 years reported. She developed lung cancer despite never having smoked or having been exposed to tobacco smoke with any regularity. "Mrs. Maher was a driving force for girls' athletics in Toledo but she surely did not neglect the boys," said the Rev. Ron Olszewski, now president of St. Francis de Sales High School and that school's principal 30 years ago when Mrs. Maher was named to the City League Athletic Board of Control. "What's happened in girls' sports, a lot of credit goes to her," Father Olszewski said. As a member of the board of control, she also helped stabilize the City League at a time of turbulence brought on by a ban on night football games, instituted because of violence at some games but an irritant to the league's parochial school members. After her 1982 promotion to TPS athletics director, she was instrumental in working with the TPS Athletic Board of Control to get the night football ban removed. "JoAnn did more work, and had more responsibility, than anyone I've ever seen," said Ed Scrutchins, who succeeded Mrs. Maher as athletics director and de facto City League commissioner when she retired in 1986. "She was a diligent, hard worker. She

was unbelievable.” JoAnn received both a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree from the College of Education of the University of Toledo. Mrs. Maher taught briefly in Michigan before becoming a physical education teacher at Toledo's Robinson Junior High School in 1956. In 1961, she began a 10-year stint as a traveling instructor and teacher specialist. She was assigned to McTigue Junior High in 1971 and placed in charge of girls' and junior high athletics district wide the following year. It was from that position, and during a time when the applicability of the federal Title IX law to scholastic sports remained unclear, that she began a revival of girls' athletics in the Toledo schools that had been largely abandoned during the 1920s and 1930s. To start a volleyball program, she hired a state “championship coach from Cleveland to run a two-week clinic in Toledo in which all girls interested in playing the sport were encouraged to enroll. “When the two weeks were over, these girls were volleyball players”. Mrs. Maher declared that girls' basketball would be played using standard five-player teams and rules, rather than the six-on-six game “designed in theory to keep girls from overexerting themselves” that required two players from each team to remain in their respective front courts and back courts, leaving just two each to run the entire floor. When state officials in 1974-75 refused to schedule a girls' tournament, Mrs. Maher organized her own tournament at Waite High School to which some of the best teams from across Ohio were invited. Shortly thereafter, a state tournament was instituted for the following year, and Woodward won the championship. “She was instrumental, both locally and statewide, in providing greater opportunities, and a number of championship opportunities, that girls had not had before,” said Dave Hackenberg, a Blade sports columnist who covered scholastic sports then. Mrs. Maher's father, Al Francis, had been a star scholastic athlete but was killed in a traffic accident when she was 6. She and her father were both inducted into the Libbey High School Hall of Fame. She grew up playing sports with the boys in her neighborhood and “was pretty much the leader of the group.” She studied dance from age 3, and later taught her students to exercise to music. At Libbey High School, she was a drum

majorette for three years and was head majorette the fall before her midterm graduation in January, 1950. She played intramural softball and basketball and was the student director of the "Libbey Cowboy Roundup". "We took it for granted that the boys played interscholastic sports and the girls played intramurals," Mrs. Maher said in a 1994 interview. "We did it just for fun." Mr. Maher met her that summer when she was working as an attendant at Toledo's Asbury Park and he was practicing basketball there. They married in 1952. Mr. Maher's own sports pursuits may have encouraged his wife to develop her athletic side, and over the years she took up bowling and golf to accompany him. Jim noted that while her interest in golf didn't really take off until after her school district retirement, she had two holes-in-one before he made his first. JoAnn and her husband may be the only husband and wife each of whom has been selected to the TPS Athletic Hall of Fame. She always considered herself to be "A Helping Hand" to all her family, friends, students and co-workers. She was a very special person. Jim and JoAnn's dog Nikki really miss her love, smile and laughter. Their home is not the same without her. She and her husband were members at Highland Meadows Golf Club from 1960-85 and Belmont Country Club from 1985-2000. After they moved to Florida, they joined River Wilderness CC in Parrish, FL. She was a 50-year member of the Eagles Auxiliary. For many years, Mrs. Maher and her mother organized a Christmas show, sponsored by the Eagles, for local orphans for which they recruited local musicians and stage talent "and made sure there were presents for every child," he said. In retirement, JoAnn was very active in a number of groups. She was a member of the University of Toledo Athletic Board, serving one term as chairman. She is a life member and served on the Board of Trustees of the U. of Toledo Alumni Association and treasurer of the Gottshall-Rex Scholarship program. She also served as Chairman of the Woman's Golf Inter-Club League, was a member of the Toledo District Golf Association and Co-Chaired the Babe Zaharias Classic Golf Tournament benefiting cancer research. Mr. Maher is the sole immediate

survivor. Their 60th wedding anniversary would have been in March. To meet her you probably really liked her, if you really got to know her you probably loved her. In honor of JoAnn, at the urging of friends, her husband has created a scholarship at the University of Toledo to support women who participated in an athletic sport during their high school academic career in Lucas County, Ohio. The student does not have to play on a University team. Any incoming, freshman woman, pursuing a baccalaureate degree is eligible for this scholarship. The student can be either a full-time or part-time student. The student must have a minimum of a 2.7 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Mr. Maher has donated \$10,000 and will match donations from others. The Office of Financial Aid will be responsible for awarding this \$500 scholarship on an annual basis. To contribute via the web, visit: <https://give2ut.utoledo.edu/Default.asp> In the special instructions box type: JoAnn Francis and James E. Maher Scholarship If you are choosing to make a gift buy using a check: Make your check payable to: The University of Toledo Foundation. In the memo line write: JoAnn Francis and James E. Maher Scholarship. Mail it to: The University of Toledo, Mail Stop 318, 2801 W. Bancroft St. Toledo, OH 43606. Please consider this tribute in lieu of flowers. A celebration of JoAnn's life will be on Saturday, June 23, between the hours of 2-4 PM at the Ansberg-West Funeral Home, 3000 Sylvania Avenue. Online condolences may be left for the family by visiting the website www.ansberg-west.com

Tribute Wall

RR

“ Jim and all of JoAnn's family, please accept my heartfelt sympathy and prayer on JoAnn's death. I remember so well the many times I worked with her and remember her only as a dedicated, loving, and honorable lady. She always had the best interest of student-athletes at heart. I am so sorry I cannot be with you today; I have a 50th reunion activity here at St. Francis this afternoon. JoAnn and all of her family are in my prayer. The world and certainly the students of Toledo, Ohio are better because of JoAnn.

Ronald Olszewski, OSFS - rolszewski@sfstoledo.org rolszewski@sfstoledo.org
- February 01, 2018 at 12:00 AM

AM

“ Dear Jim, JoAnn was a great lady. She will be missed by many. My thoughts and prayers are with you. Sincerely, Ann Murnen

Ann Murnen - February 01, 2018 at 12:00 AM

FC

“ What a well deserved tribute in the Blade. I first met JoAnn in the 60s when she was a traveling phys.ed. specialist, when I was a teacher/coach at the then Hamilton school. Her attention to detail and organization was something I tried to emulate. She always made time for those in need of advice, etc. Everyone who came in contact with her is a better person because of it. I am anxious to attend the memorial service to pay my respects.

Fred Cohen - February 01, 2018 at 12:00 AM