

Florence Peragallo

When Florence Peragallo joined the staff of the NJSIAA in 1973, it coincided with perhaps the most exciting time in the history of the organization that was founded back in 1918.

She was hired as the NJSIAA's first female director, and the move came months after the passage of Title IX, the federal legislation which granted unprecedented opportunities for females in sports, academics and elsewhere.

Previously, she had been athletic director at Mother Seton High School in Clark, and was chair of a NJSIAA consulting committee on girls sports.

The NJSIAA had been sponsoring a small program for girls sports since the late 1960s, but the sport offerings were small and state tournaments were in their earliest stages.

Upon joining the staff in September of 1973, she was tasked with administrating the NJSIAA's burgeoning program for girls sports. At the time of Title IX's passage, roughly one in 27 high school girls participated in athletics.

Those numbers grew exponentially very quickly, ultimately to the point where the ratio nowadays is roughly one out of every three.

While it was a great breakthrough, there were also challenges. People questioned how girls could be accommodated in terms of scheduling, facility access and transportation, among other things. There were also questions on whether girls were capable. And while media coverage eventually followed, many headlines referred to girls by their first name rather than their last.

Peragallo stayed on the staff until retiring in 1992, having overseen the remarkable growth



that made New Jersey a national leader in girls sports participation and offerings.

When she joined the NJSIAA, a total of 284 schools out of roughly 400 offered at least one sport. That generally meant basketball, track, cross country, field hockey, tennis and softball. Some had specific roots, like field hockey in South Jersey, track at the Shore and basketball among Catholic schools, particularly in the North.

Not many schools offered a full menu. When Peragallo retired, more than 430 schools were offering those sports and many, many others, with a full complement of accompanying state tournaments.

Florence Peragallo grew up in Elizabeth, where she graduated from Battin High School, which was the only all-girl public school in the state. Florence attended Panzer College, where she played field hockey, basketball and softball. She

also worked there for six years, teaching physical education and coaching the same three sports. She also earned a masters from NYU.

Florence also taught physical education for two years at Linden High School, before moving to Mother Seton, where she taught and served as athletic director for eight years before joining the NJSIAA staff.

She received many honors, including induction into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame as part of the seven-member charter class in 1996, as well as being recipient of the prestigious NJSIAA Award of Honor in 1992.

Florence, whose husband Lou was the longtime athletic director at A.L. Johnson High School in Clark, passed away on June 30, 2024 at age 97.