

Janet R. Cone – A Coach for Life (continued)
by Kirk Borland

Janet relates with pride the validation that the athletics program has received from Chancellor Mary K. Grant who celebrates athletics as a high impact experience with a “family atmosphere” that reaches out in both classroom and community. The culture within the Bulldog program is transparent, built on integrity to do what is right, and demonstrating respect toward all.

Sitting courtside with Janet, almost immediately the conversation turns to the student-athletes on the court. Janet knows her Bulldogs by name and how they are doing in the classroom as well as on the playing field. She is passionate about helping them achieve their dreams for the future.

This commitment to coaching, mentoring, and teaching has its roots in her days as a student-athlete, coach, and educator. Janet says, “A mentor is a person who keeps telling you, ‘You can do it.’” And she remembers fondly a personal mentor who insisted, “You must pay it forward.”

Surely that was one of the lessons that made Janet an early advocate for the OLLI student-athlete mentoring effort led by Dick Murray and Jim Lenburg. Among other things, Janet saw the mentoring program as a competitive advantage for recruiting Bulldog student-athletes. As she says, many universities have ‘good coaches,’ ‘winning programs,’ and ‘scholarships’; but being able to offer student-athletes a mentor who brings a wealth of life experience and a concern for their success is unique and persuasive. Beginning with a handful of student-athlete mentees three years ago, the program has now expanded to encompass roughly 70 Bulldogs.

When asked what’s left to be done, Janet is quick to reply, “We need to ensure the athletics program remains financially stable.” With costs constantly increasing and no North Carolina state funds for athletics, it is a continuing challenge to remain in the black and provide a high-impact experience for Bulldog student-athletes.

To that end, we invite all OLLI members to check out the Bulldog game schedule and take in an exciting couple of hours in the Kimmel Arena. You won’t be disappointed!