

Cathy Wheat

Distinguished Service Award 2015



As the founder of the Highland Belles, Cathy Wheat has been a mentor and motivator for hundreds of young women at Highland Park High School. In 1982, when a group of girls decided that they wanted to start a dance team at the school, they approached their PE teacher, Cathy Wheat to become their sponsor. At that time they did not know about her extensive background in dance as a Kilgore Rangerette. At first, there was resistance to starting a drill team for Highland Park based on a concern that the team would not be accepted by the student body. The students not only accepted the Belles, but whole heartedly embraced the team and continue to be extremely proud to have them represent Highland Park on and off of the field.

From the very beginning, Cathy Wheat was determined that the members of the team would serve as a positive example to other students in the school. She insisted on hard work, discipline and a commitment from each of the young women who were selected for the team. The team grew from the 33 girls selected to be the first Highland Belle to the more than 60 member team that they are today.

Cathy Wheat has done a great deal more than start what is now the most highly regarded high school dance team in the country, she has been a valuable role model and mentor to hundreds of young women. Many of them, now grown with families of their own, still rely on the lessons taught to them by Cathy Wheat to manage difficult and stressful times in their lives. From helping to develop a strong level of perseverance which enabled one former Belle to manage being a single mother who was also dealing with cancer, to balancing busy careers and families with grace, Cathy has helped members of the Belles to develop the ability to never give up and to always do their best at what ever task or challenge they have met in their lives.

Cathy was born in Lubbock, the daughter of parents who were educators. She attended Kilgore Jr. College where she was a Rangerette, and where she has a scholarship named in her honor. She graduated from Texas Tech University and received her Master's degree in Physical Education from East Texas State University. She taught in Lorenzo ISD and in Irving ISD before coming to Highland Park. Mrs. Wheat was chosen by Cheers magazine as the number one drill team instructor in the nation and was the first director to be inducted into the Drill Team Hall of Fame.

Cathy and her husband, Jim, now live in Gordon, Texas, but she is in Dallas every week as she continues to teach dance and mentor young women. She will always have a significant place in the history and hearts of Highland Park as the woman who started the cherished tradition of the Highland Belles.