

Betty Perkins-Carpenter

By admin

Owner, Senior Fitness

By Kristine Bruneau | Photo by Tiffany Boula

Dedication, tenacity and persistence have paid off for extraordinary author, entrepreneur, Korean War veteran and Olympic diving coach, Betty Perkins-Carpenter, Ph.D.



Perkins is a woman of many accomplishments and 2015 signifies another milestone for the 84-year-young Perkins: It's her 55th year in business. Perkins is best known for Perkins Swim Club where thousands of families brought their children for swimming and diving lessons between 1960 and 1996, and Fit by Five preschool, which ran from 1969 until she sold the business in 1997.

What began, as a backyard swim school in 1960 became an instant success with more than 200 students on a waiting list for lessons by the end of the school's second summer. Perkins knew she had something special.

"When I started my business, I was the only privately owned swim club in the eastern half of the United States," says Perkins who, at the time, was raising two small children and caring for two foster babies.

"But I had no business background and no business plan when I walked into the bank to ask for a \$116,000 loan to build a facility."

Initially, the bank didn't warm to her idea. However, Perkins wasn't about to take no for an answer. Ever the innovator, she proposed to raise some of the money on her own— an idea that ultimately persuaded the bank to loan her the difference.

On July 24, 1964 Perkins Swim Club in Penfield opened its doors. The gregarious Perkins had a reputation for motivating young athletes at all levels. She produced a long list of champions, including two Olympic divers, one of whom was the late Wendy Wyland.

Born Betty Lou Kalmn, she started swimming competitively at six years old. Her mother Bertha Loeser was a Canadian national champion for swimming and diving and saw potential in her daughter's abilities.

"In my first swim meet, I came in third. My mother didn't speak to me all the way home," says Perkins. "She was a fabulous teacher and her students loved her, but she was also hard driving and very strict. I think my dedication and work ethics come from her."

By 1969, Perkins had expanded her club to include Fit by Five, the first athletically oriented preschool in America where academics are taught through sports.

“Fit by Five, which means physically fit and mentally alert by five years of age, was so successful that it grew to five additional sites and franchised into six states,” says Perkins, who conceived the nursery school alternative.

While running four successful companies, she continued to research balance and its effect on various age groups, from infants in the water to pre-school children, the elite Olympic athlete and older adults. Her devotion led her to develop a unique Six-Step Balance System™ that uses repetitive movements and simple activities to help seniors improve their flexibility and mobility. It’s also the center of her current business Senior Fitness.

“By teaching older adults proper stretching, exercise and balance techniques to prevent falls, seniors can potentially reduce injuries and fear, improving their own sense of emotional well-being,” said Perkins, author of “How to Prevent Falls: Better Balance, Independence and Energy in 6 Simple Steps®” and “The Fun of Fitness,” in addition to the guide “Stretching in Bed.”

And she’s taken on another mission: tracking down Korean War veterans who might be pictured in one of 138 photos taken at the beginning of the Korean War by the U.S. Department of Defense in 1950. So far she’s had 11 positive matches.

“A lot of these men didn’t come home,” said Perkins who trained crews in water survival while serving in the Air Force from 1949 to 1950.

Perkins received the collection of black-and-white, glossy photographs from the Monroe County Chapter of the Korean War Veterans Association three years ago. She has been reaching out in many different ways for assistance to connect with veterans and their families. The photos, scanned by Kodak Alaris, are featured in an online photo gallery at koreanwar.democratandchronicle.com.

“Time is of the essence because the veterans are in their 80s,” says Perkins. “I want to get these photos to them and their families.”

No doubt that whatever goal Perkins focuses on, she’ll achieve it.

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