



The Chargers Club: 25 Years of Support for Athletic Programs and Students

Twenty-five years ago, a small group of New London women gathered on the Colby-Sawyer College campus to consider how they could support athletics and help the college's student-athletes gain the attention and recognition they deserved. Today, the Chargers Club still pursues the same goals, raising more than \$340,000 for the program since its founding.

Many of the Chargers Club's founding members – Pat Kelsey, Gusta Teach, Emily Weathers Campbell and Janet Kidder – joined current club president Jen Ellis '85 and other friends from the college and community to celebrate the club's founding and reflect on its impact on the college's athletic programs over the years.

In 1982, then Athletic Director Judy Newcomb approached Pat Kelsey, a former athlete and physical education teacher at the college, about the need for a community-based athletic booster club to help support the teams. Kelsey, who today serves on the college's Board of Trustees, jumped at the chance. She called on her many friends in the community to join and asked Gusta Teach to serve as president while she took on the secretarial role.

"In those days, women's athletics wasn't high on anyone's agenda," says Teach. "The kids on the teams were so devoted and not getting any attention. We thought it would be helpful to have someone behind them, not just financially but also there cheering them on."

To raise funds, the club members asked community members and business

leaders to donate items for Charger Club auctions, which they held during Parents Weekends. The group auctioned off golf clubs, art work and other items to benefit the teams.

"The teams needed basic things such as uniforms and warm-up suits, and large ticket items such as tennis courts," says Janet Kidder, the club's former treasurer. "We didn't have any trouble getting people interested in donating and supporting the club. It wasn't grand – just people in the community who wanted to help out."

The Chargers Club also initiated an annual awards ceremony and banquet to honor the student-athletes, a tradition that continues today. "We wanted to make a fuss over what the student athletes were doing," said Kelsey. "They worked so hard and deserved some recognition."



Alumna Jen Ellis '85 (second from left), president of the Chargers Club, joined some of the club's founding members and other community friends to celebrate the club's 25th anniversary. The group includes (from left) Emily Campbell, Ellis, Pat Kelsey, Janet Kidder and Gusta Teach.

For Kidder, the club was simply a new way for the community to get involved in and support the college. "The college is important to the community, just as the community is important to the college," she said. "It's as true today as it was 25 years ago."

Over the years, the club has made the athletic programs better in ways small and large. In its first year, the club raised nearly \$3,000 for athletic programs, and by 1989, had helped to bring in more than \$130,000 to build the original Kelsey Tennis Courts. They've contributed sound and video systems and a lighted scorer's table for the Coffin Field House, as well as a records board for the Knight Natatorium. Just as importantly, the club's work has made life better for students, coaches, parents and fans.

Erica DeSanty '05, a former tri-captain of the women's basketball team, said that while the "material advancements" brought about by the club made her athletic experience better, their support for her team meant even more to her. "As strong supporters of our team, they personally made me feel like I was a great athlete...by coming to all of our games, hanging signs in the gym and always telling each of us how well we did."

Soccer player Jim Daley '08 serves as student member of the Chargers' Board. He says the club ensures that all athletes can compete at a high level. "I'm able to experience, first hand, the generosity and help that the members are able to provide to the athletic community."

Jen Ellis became Chargers Club president in 1992, a role she continues today. She says that as the college grew and prospered, it could operationally support its 16 varsity teams. The club's role today is to make the programs "better and nicer," according to Ellis, and to make the teams stand out among others in their conference.

Athletic Director Debi Field McGrath '68 believes the Chargers Club's involvement makes Colby-Sawyer's athletic program distinctive. "Their personal commitment to students and teams, as well as their financial support, has helped to launch Colby-Sawyer as one of the premier athletics programs in New England," she said.

Today benefit auctions have been replaced by an annual Tennis Tournament, small retail and raffle efforts, and annual appeal letter sent to alumni and friends of the college. The club now raises about \$20,000 annually to support the athletic awards ceremony and the teams' wish lists.

The Chargers Club members take pride in their accomplishments, in part because what began as a small group of friends with good intentions has grown deep roots at the college and in the community.

Calendar of Events

Monday, Jan. 21

**Call to Conscience:
Honoring Dr. Martin Luther
King Jr.'s Message of
Nonviolence Today**

7 p.m., Wheeler Hall, Ware
Campus Center

International peace worker Arthur Romano honors the legacy and struggle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by bringing his teachings to life and illuminating their relevance today. This compelling introduction highlights King's understanding of the basic principles of nonviolence and his quest for social change.

Free admission.

Tuesday, Jan. 29

**Performance by Yu Wei,
China's Daughter of Dance**

7 p.m., Sawyer Center Theatre
Choreographer and dancer Yu Wei's Dance Collection is inspired by the synergy between dance, poetry and music, and drawn from styles such as Chinese Classical, folk, ballet and modern dance. She has performed across the United States, including at the Manhattan Center in New York and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children. They go on sale Jan. 23 and can be purchased at the door or by calling the box office at 526-3670.