FROM THE HILL TO THE HALL

ALUMNAE DONNA SHALALA AND KATHRINE SWITZER
are among the newest class of inductees into
the National Women’s Hall of Fame

BY CHRISTINE YACKEL
At first glance, Annie Oakley, Amelia Earhart, and Oprah Winfrey don’t seem to have much in common. But all share the distinction of having been inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame, which pays tribute to some of the greatest women in American history for their significant impact on the country and the world. Syracuse University boasts seven alumnae among this esteemed group, including two of its newest inductees: Donna E. Shalala G’70, H’87, an accomplished educator and public official; and Kathrine V. Switzer ’68, G’72, a leading advocate for women’s sports. “Several of the women’s colleges have a significant number of women in the hall, but I believe Syracuse has the largest group of inductees from a coeducational institution,” says Christine Moulton, executive director of the National Women’s Hall of Fame. “It’s not surprising that Syracuse University would be well represented because it’s located so close to the birthplace of the women’s rights movement in Seneca Falls, New York.”

In 1969, the residents of Seneca Falls established the National Women’s Hall of Fame in the small village where the struggle for women’s rights began. It was there in 1848 that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott (see page 25), and 300 other women and men held the first Women’s Rights Convention to demand equality for women—including the right to vote. The hall showcases the inspiring life stories of 236 extraordinary women who acted to make the world a better place. “The National Women’s Hall of Fame is important because for many years women were somewhat humble about their accomplishments, and there isn’t much written about them in historical texts,” Moulton says. “I think young women need role models and examples of leadership to look up to, and there’s not a more fitting place than Seneca Falls to preserve the legacy of these great women for generations to come.”

Syracuse University’s Women of the Hall represent the full spectrum of American life—from the courtroom, to the pulpit, to outer space (see page 27). And now Donna Shalala and Kathrine Switzer take their place among SU’s women of distinction who have found a permanent home in the National Women’s Hall of Fame.
DONNA E. SHALALA G’70, H’87

ANSWERING THE CALL

Growing up in Cleveland, Donna Shalala never dreamed she would become one of the nation’s most prominent educators and public servants. In fact, she had her sights set on a career in journalism. “I wanted adventure and thought it would be exciting and glamorous to travel the world covering wars,” says Shalala, president of the University of Miami. But her plan to become a war correspondent changed in an instant when, in her first year at Western College for Women in Ohio, she listened to President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address challenging America’s youth to take up the mantle of public service. Like many of her generation, Shalala was inspired to answer his call by being one of the first to volunteer for the newly formed Peace Corps, serving two years in southern Iran teaching at an agricultural college. “For the first time in my life I learned what poverty was, and I acquired a real feel for the way most of the world lives and what they have to do to survive,” Shalala says. “It also gave me an understanding of how politics and religion are interpreted in other cultures. It was an extraordinary experience.”

After the Peace Corps, Shalala traveled the world for a year before returning home to study for a doctorate in political science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. She loved what she fondly calls “Camp Maxwell,” so it was particularly disheartening when the chairman of the social sciences department said he wouldn’t help her get research funding because she was a woman and women never finished their Ph.D. degrees. “In the late ’60s, there were men at the Maxwell School who didn’t think women should be there,” Shalala says. “Fortunately, there was a larger group of more progressive leaders who provided the women students with opportunities to learn and grow. If you were willing to work your tail off, they were perfectly willing to support you.”

Shalala credits her Lebanese heritage and Midwestern roots for her strong work ethic and straightforward management style that have proven effective in dealing with some of the most controversial issues of our time, including race relations, censorship, health care, and welfare reform. A leading scholar on the political economy of state and local governments, she spent many years as a faculty member at Columbia University before her first foray into public service.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2011 Inductee, National Women’s Hall of Fame

2001-present President, University of Miami

1993-2001 Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

1987-93 Chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Madison

1980-87 President, Hunter College, City University of New York

1977-80 Assistant secretary for policy development and research, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

1972-79 Associate professor and chair, Program in Politics and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

1970-72 Assistant professor of political science, Bernard Baruch College, City University of New York

1962-64 U.S. Peace Corps volunteer, Iran

Among the 2011 National Women’s Hall of Fame inductees are (far right photo, left to right) Lilly Ledbetter, who fought to achieve pay equity for women; Barbara A. Mikulski, the first Democratic U.S. senator elected in her own right; Donna Shalala, groundbreaking educator and public servant; Kathrine Switzer, who transformed the sport of running for women; Dr. Loretta C. Ford, who implemented the first pediatric nurse practitioner model; and Helen Murray Free, who revolutionized diagnostic testing.

Photo courtesy of the University of Miami
into government as a member of a state financing board (affectionately known as “Big MAC”) for New York City, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. She went on to serve in the Carter administration as assistant secretary for policy development and research for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and then returned to academia as president of Hunter College. Appointed chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1987, she was the first woman to lead a Big 10 university.

Shalala is perhaps best known as the longest serving secretary of health and human services (HHS) in U.S. history. Appointed by President Clinton in 1993, she implemented welfare reform, championed the State Children’s Health Insurance Programs, raised childhood immunization rates to the highest levels in history, revitalized the National Institutes of Health, and directed Federal Drug Administration and Medicare reforms. “We achieved a lot during the years I was HHS secretary,” says Shalala, who was the first Arab American to serve in a cabinet position. “American kids were healthier and wealthier by the time we left office. My only regret is we weren’t able to enact health care reform.”

During her long and distinguished career, Shalala has garnered more than four dozen honorary degrees and countless awards, including the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom—the nation’s highest civilian honor—awarded by President Bush in 2008 in recognition of her efforts to “help more Americans live lives of purpose and dignity.” And in 2010, Shalala was honored with the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights, which recognizes individuals for their outstanding dedication to improving the health and life chances of disadvantaged populations around the world.

Among these many honors and accolades, Shalala says induction into the National Women’s Hall of Fame holds special meaning. “It’s actually unbelievable when you come to think about it because I don’t consider myself a trailblazer,” she says. “I see myself standing on the shoulders of the first wave of activists who won women the right to vote and the leaders of the modern women’s movement who opened up opportunities for women like me. Thanks to these courageous women we’ve made great progress, but we still have miles to go. We need more women in corporate leadership, running our universities, leading our armies, and serving in government. Our agenda is not finished.”

MOTT REMEMBERED

LUcretia Coffin Mott IS ONE of the least recognizable leaders of the women’s rights movement, yet she had a huge impact on one of the greatest social movements of our time. For her, the drive for women’s rights was part of the larger cause to break down all barriers imposed by tradition and established religion. A Quaker minister, Mott felt particularly compelled to speak out against slavery, which she described as the religious movement of the age. “Although Mott was one of the moving forces behind the first Women’s Rights Convention, people have a hard time understanding her contribution to the women’s movement because she is seen as an abolitionist, not a suffragist,” says Carol Faulkner, professor of history at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. “She viewed American politics as corrupted by slavery, so she didn’t see the point of getting women the vote.”

Faulkner is the author of Lucretia Mott’s Heresy: Abolition and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America (University of Pennsylvania Press), the first biography of Mott in 30 years. She describes Mott as an outspoken and tireless crusader who lectured to large audiences throughout the country—including the South—about the dual struggle for racial and sexual equality. Unfortunately, Mott spoke extemporaneously, so it was a challenge for Faulkner to capture the content of her speeches and sermons. “I received a graduate fellowship to study Mott’s personal papers, which are located all over the country, including a few letters here at SU,” Faulkner says. “Once I delved deeper, I knew I had to write a biography of this radical activist who dedicated her life to achieving social justice, and restore her to her rightful place in the history of the women’s rights movement in America.”
GOING THE DISTANCE

Like Donna Shalala, Kathrine Switzer wanted to be a journalist until a life-changing experience sent her on a different path. Switzer’s defining moment came in 1967 when, two miles into the Boston Marathon, an irate official attacked her from the sidelines and tried to force her out of the race simply because she was a woman. A widely distributed photograph of the incident sparked outrage and went on to become one of Time-Life’s 100 photographs that changed the world. “I wasn’t trying to be the first woman to run the marathon,” says Switzer, who, in spite of being traumatized, went on to finish the race. “There was nothing about gender in the rules, and I filled out the entry form with my initials because I was crazy for J.D. Salinger and e.e. cummings, and I thought it was cool. The race officials obviously thought K.V. Switzer was a guy.”

When Switzer was a skinny 12-year-old, she was determined to build up her strength and stamina to qualify for the high school field hockey team. So she started running a mile a day on a track her father measured off for her in the backyard of their Vienna, Virginia, home. Not only did she make the field hockey team, but the basketball team as well. In 1966 Switzer transferred from Lynchburg College to Syracuse University to study journalism. But when she discovered SU didn’t offer intercollegiate sports for women, she asked the track coach if she could run on the men’s team. “The coach was a bit shocked,” Switzer says. “He said I couldn’t run officially because it was against NCAA rules, but I was welcome to work out with the team. He thought I wouldn’t show up, but I did show up the next day and every day after that.”

One of the assistant coaches was 52-year-old Arnie Briggs, who at one time had been a top marathon runner. Although Briggs was not an official member of the coaching staff, he trained with the men’s team daily and then went back to his job at the U.S. Postal Service. “Arnie felt sorry for me because I was so slow, but he was impressed that I was out there training every day,” Switzer says. In the winter when the men’s team ran on the indoor track in Manley Field House, Switzer and Briggs preferred to train together outside in the fresh air and snow. Switzer was fascinated by Briggs’s stories about running the Boston Marathon and told him she wanted to run it, too. “Arnie said I couldn’t run the distance because girls are too weak and fragile,” Switzer says. “I told him that was ridiculous, and he promised if I ran the 26.2-mile distance in practice, he’d take me to Boston. I ran 31 miles just to be sure—Arnie passed out.”

Briggs was behind Switzer during the Boston Marathon when the official tried to rip No. 261 off of her sweatshirt and drag her out of the race. At that moment, this frightening, and somewhat embarrassing encounter transformed Switzer from a naïve 20-year-old into a radicalized woman who was determined to educate the public on the value of women’s participation in sports. In the decades that followed, Switzer created many opportunities for women athletes that did not previously exist, including the Avon Running Program, which grew into 400 races in 27 countries with more than a million women participating. That
program allowed for her greatest achievement, which was getting the women’s marathon included in the Olympics for the first time, at the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. "It was always my goal after the Boston incident to get the International Olympic Committee to include a women’s marathon in the Games,” Switzer says. “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been shouted at or laughed at for having such a pipe dream, because there were people who still believed a woman’s uterus would fall out if she ran more than 100 yards.”

Switzer sees herself as an unwitting trailblazer who didn’t set out to break gender barriers, but when confronted with an unexpected opportunity, couldn’t turn away. "I felt extremely responsible because the sport of running has given me so much confidence that I knew I needed to advocate for other women,” she says. “I get a lot of awards for crashing the Boston Marathon, but that’s something that happened to me. Being inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame is extremely special because this award is for creating social change by giving women an opportunity to excel, compete, and be empowered in all areas of their lives. For women, it’s the physical equivalent of winning the right to vote. My story is only the beginning.”

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

**2011** Inductee, National Women’s Hall of Fame; commentator, WBZ-TV’s live coverage of the Boston Marathon for 32nd consecutive year

**2010** Returned to marathon running after a 34-year hiatus

**2007** Launched the hardcover edition of *Marathon Woman* on the 40th anniversary of running the Boston Marathon

**1998** Wrote *Running and Walking for Women Over 40*; inductee in the first class of the National Distance Running Hall of Fame

**1987** Won first of several Emmy Awards for sports television commentary

**1984** Broadcast first women’s Olympic marathon race in Los Angeles

**1977** Founder and director, Avon International Running Circuit

**1974** Won the New York City Marathon

**1972** Placed third in the Boston Marathon, now officially open to women

**1967** First official female entrant in the Boston Marathon

**SU’S WOMEN OF THE HALL**

**Belva Lockwood** 1857, G 1872, H 1909, first woman to practice law before the U.S. Supreme Court. Year inducted: 1983

**Ruth Colvin Johnson** ’59, H’84, founder of Literacy Volunteers of America. Year inducted: 1993

**Reverend Betty Bone Schiess** G’47, leader of the effort to ordain women priests in the Episcopal Church in America. Year inducted: 1994

**Eileen Collins** ’78, H’01, first woman astronaut to pilot a space shuttle. Year inducted: 1995

**Karen DeCrow** L’72, lawyer, activist, and former president of the National Organization for Women. Year inducted: 2009

**Donna Shalala** G’70, H’87, educator, public servant. Year inducted: 2011

**Kathrine Switzer** ’68, G’72, women’s sports advocate. Year inducted: 2011