

## MONTEVALLO HIGH

# 'She loved those Bulldogs'

## Teacher, sports supporter 'Miss Susie' DeMent dead at 96

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Larry Haynes remembers that his first year to teach at Montevallo High School was the 50th year that Susie DeMent was at the school.

"I have never seen anybody like her," said Haynes, now principal of Oak Mountain Middle School. "She was my mentor."

Haynes is among hundreds of people whose lives were positively affected by the woman affectionately known as "Miss Susie," whose typing classes set students on their way to success and whose support of Bulldog athletics earned her a spot in the Alabama High School Sports Hall of Fame.

DeMent died Wednesday at her home in Montevallo. She was 96.

"Momma always said that they put Miss Susie out there and built the school around her," Angie Bunn Frederick wrote on a Facebook page dedicated to the retired teacher. "How funny but yet so true. She truly was the heart of MHS and a Bulldog all the way."

Frederick and her mother, Linda Freeman, were former students of DeMent.

"She covers quite a span of generations," said Tena Niven, who coaches volleyball and girls basketball at the school.

Haynes said in 50 years of teaching, DeMent never



Miss Susie DeMent at her desk on July 13, 1978. (File)

had to send a student to the office to be disciplined. That, he said, was a statement of the respect she had earned.

"She could get their attention just as well as Nick Saban could today," he said.

Part of Haynes' job when he began at Montevallo was to sponsor the bi-weekly school newspaper, Spotlight. DeMent had been the technical adviser to the newspaper since 1946.

For years, the paper was done on a mimeograph machine, and DeMent typed all the stories that appeared onto a stencil and hand drew headlines.

DeMent retired in 1987 because state law mandated it at age 70. But she didn't stop, and accepted a part-time salary to continue doing all that

she had done at the school in an unofficial capacity.

While she was no longer the business teacher, she continued to sponsor all the activities that she had, including all of the Award Days at the school.

"She would do all the certificates, arrange all the plaques (and) wrote out everything verbatim for the presentation," Haynes said. "It was that organized."

DeMent's tireless dedication to and support of the Bulldogs athletic program was so great that she was inducted into the Alabama High School Sports Hall of Fame in 1997. She was the first non-coaching female to merit that honor.

"In the earlier years, she made these huge banana puddings, and she invited

football players, cheerleaders, everybody over to her house after games," Haynes said. "Or she'd have something at the school just for them to celebrate that spirit that she had."

For generations, she was statistician for basketball, kept the scorebook for baseball and maintained records for football. State Sen. Rodger Smitherman remembers DeMent always being at the basketball games in his playing days.

"She was there, at the scorers table," he said. "If she could walk, she was there."

Smitherman said he knew of DeMent's family before he knew her. He said her family sold land to his father.

"Back in the day, you didn't have a lot of people selling black folks property, good property," the senator said. "She didn't make a distinction between students. To her, a student was just a student. It didn't matter about the color of their skin. She was a person I think the Lord sent to bridge the gap as we moved into integration."

Nancy Wilstach, then a student at the University of Montevallo, would cover Montevallo football games for The Birmingham News.

"Miss Susie was always at all of them, and she was always in the press box," the now retired reporter said. "Sometimes, I couldn't see who made a tackle, and if I didn't know, I would ask Miss Susie because she knew."

"She bled orange and blue," Wilstach said. "She loved those Bulldogs."

DeMent received Shelby County's first Teacher of the Year award in 1984. The Montevallo High School gymnasium was named after her in 1978 and rededicated a few years ago.

The Alabama Scholastic Press Association named its Advisor of the Year award in her honor. She also received the "Gold Key Award" from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association at Columbia University in 1999 for her contributions to the student press.

The video from her reception speech garnered a standing ovation. She was also featured in a story by USA Today.

Bobby Pierson, who formerly was the longtime basketball coach, recounted the sentiment that a letter from anywhere in the world addressed "Miss Susie, Montevallo, Alabama," would reach her.

"Everyone here in this small town loved Miss DeMent," he said.

*Visitation will be 5-9 p.m. today in the Susie DeMent Gymnasium at Montevallo High. Funeral will be noon Saturday in the gymnasium with burial at Montevallo Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Montevallo High Athletic Department.*