

Inducted into the Valley Forge Hall of Fame on Friday, September 15, 2006

## *Coleen Gallagher Wilson ~ Class of 1983*

After graduating from Valley Forge High School in 1983, I received a four-year athletic scholarship to Villanova University. I was a member of the cross country and indoor and outdoor track & field teams. My accomplishments as a runner at Villanova included:

- Earning NCAA All-American honors twice
- Being a member of 11 teams (out of a possible 12) that qualified for the NCAA championships, including the 1984 team that finished 3<sup>rd</sup> nationally in indoor track and 9<sup>th</sup> in cross country
- Being a member of 9 Big East Conference champion cross country and track teams
- Earning 4 individual Big East Conference track & field titles in the 3000M, 4x800M Relay and Distance Medley Relay
- Earning 2 individual ECAC indoor track & field titles in the 4x800M Relay & Distance Medley Relay

At the indoor NCAA championship meet in 1987, I was a member of the 4x800M Villanova team that briefly held the indoor world record for the event before the record was broken the next day in the finals.

After graduating from Villanova with a B.A. in English in 1987, I served for two years as a graduate assistant coach with Villanova's cross country and track teams as I completed masters degree coursework.

- In 1989, I was on the coaching staff of the cross country team that won Villanova's first NCAA championship. That team consisted of three future Olympians, including Sonia O'Sullivan, who won a Silver medal for Ireland in the 5000M in the 2000 Sydney Games.

In 1989, I earned a Masters Degree (M.S.) in Community Counseling from Villanova. In 1989, ***I married a fellow Valley Forge alumnus, Neal Wilson (VF Class of 1984)***. After teaching elementary school and working for a counseling organization in Philadelphia for a year, I began law school at Villanova University in 1990.

### **Catholic University of America (1990-1993)**

In 1991, Neal and I relocated from Philadelphia to Washington, DC and I transferred to Catholic University's Columbus School of Law. That year I was selected to join the law review and published an academic paper on the subject of the legal rights of grandparents in termination of parental rights proceedings. During my two years of law school at Catholic University, I volunteered in a DC agency that represents abused children in termination of parental rights proceedings. In April 1992, Neal and I had our first child, Kyle. In 1993, I earned my law degree and be-

came a member of the Pennsylvania and DC bars.

### **Professional Career**

From 1993 to 1994, I served two consecutive clerkships with DC Superior Court trial judges. During my second clerkship, Neal and I had our second child, Kara.

From 1994 to 1995, I worked for a Washington, DC based public policy firm. I spearheaded a project that produced an educational videotape on the U.S. judicial system. The video was distributed to libraries and schools throughout the U.S. and included appearances by members of Congress and the Judiciary.

### **Family Career**

With the birth of our third child, Megan, in 1996, I decided to temporarily suspend my professional legal career. That suspension has lasted an astonishing ten years and spanned the births of three additional children: Emily in 1998, Bryn in 2000 and Kelly in 2003.

Neal and I (and our six children) have resided in Potomac, MD, a suburb of Washington, DC, for the past five years. I am actively involved with the children and their many activities, from soccer and choir practices to Brownie meetings. The children's ages range from Kyle, 14, who is himself entering high school this year, to Kelly, 3.

### **The Valley Forge Hall of Fame Honor**

I am very honored to have been selected to join the Valley Forge Hall of Fame. Although it has been more than 20 years since I graduated from Valley Forge, it seems almost like yesterday that I was running on the streets and through the parks of Parma Heights during cross country season and on the Valley Forge track behind the school in spring. I made lasting friendships at Valley Forge and learned many of life's most important lessons.

I feel that Valley Forge helped me find within myself many of the strengths necessary to meet the challenges I later faced outside of Parma Heights, Cleveland and Ohio. Although athletics provided me with the opportunity to go to the East Coast and compete athletically throughout the country and with women from around the globe, my broader academic and social experience at Valley Forge imbued me with the confidence to succeed in my future academic and professional pursuits.

With six children and a host of responsibilities, I unfortunately do not have the opportunity to travel back to Ohio very frequently. It never seems to fail, however, that when I do, I take the time to show my older children the community in which Neal and I grew up and the schools we attended, most

