



Eighty-two year-old Lois Creamer displays some of her medals and certificates from the various 10K and half-marathon events in which she's competed.

## On the Road, Again

By **Patty Kruszewski, Henrico Citizen Managing Editor**

Like most people who work full-time, Lois Creamer looks forward to the weekends.

But that's where Creamer's similarity to most people ends.

At 82, the legal secretary for Williams Mullen rises at seven every weekday to commute from her western Henrico home to the law firm's downtown offices. If a coworker happens to mention the word retirement, she just smiles. "Retire?" she gently chides them. "Oh, that is a bad word!"

And while the typical worker looks forward to Saturdays as a chance to sleep in, Creamer would not dream of it.

"I wake up at 5 a.m. on weekends and I can't wait to get out of bed and prepare. I'm so motivated!"

Her reason to "prepare" at that hour? Two years ago, Creamer joined the Ukrops Monument Avenue 10K training team at the Tuckahoe YMCA and bonded with a group of runners and walkers who continue to train together to this day. Not only do the friends get together for Saturday training at The Collegiate School, but they also travel as a group to out-of-town races.

So after Creamer walked several 10Ks (a bad knee rules out running) and was looking for a new challenge, they encouraged her to join them for a half marathon.

"It was just magical!" she says of September's Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon in Virginia Beach. Participating in her first half marathon was exciting in itself; but an experience four miles from the finish line, as her energy started to fade, convinced her the weekend was charmed.

"I got on Atlantic Avenue," she recalls, "and I had just gotten the words in my mind, 'I'm not going to make it' – when Joe Vassar came running back!" Her friend had finished his race and returned to accompany and encourage her for the final leg.

"He distracted me," she says gratefully. "And he told me not to look at the street signs, because they're all numbered!"

What's more, Creamer crossed the finish line with the top time in her age group, and came home laden with medals and plaques to add to her collection on the wall at Williams Mullen.

### War Bride to First Mate

Perhaps it was inevitable that Creamer would grow up fitness-minded and excel in things physical. A native of Australia, she began "calisthenics" as a three-year-old, then swam and played tennis while studying shorthand, business skills and even millinery

at a girls technical school.

In 1942, she met a young American soldier who was training at a camp outside Melbourne. They were introduced by friends he had encountered at a local hangout serving milkshakes – otherwise known as a "milk bar."

Creamer pauses to laugh as she tells the story, exclaiming, "My children like to say, 'Mom! You met Dad at a bar!'"

Their wartime courtship lasted four years, of which they spent all but three months apart. "I wrote him every day," she says, "and sent him boiled fruitcakes, so they wouldn't spoil."

When she arrived in the States at age 21, she got off the ship (which held 800 other war brides) on the West Coast and boarded a train for her husband's hometown of Norfolk, Virginia. As the train passed through bleak northern landscapes in Idaho and Montana, she recalls occasional pangs of doubt and thoughts of, "What have I done?"

Two children followed, but Creamer continued her active lifestyle; voice lessons and an opera workshop led eventually to song and dance performances at a local dinner theater. A charter member of the Norfolk Savoyards (Gilbert and Sullivan), she also worked for the law firm of Willcox and Savage, and cites as a favorite memory the time she played the jilted bride in "Trial by Jury" for a room full of lawyers and judges at a Virginia Bar meeting.

Her musical and thespian activities helped Creamer deal with the devastation when her marriage dissolved after more than 20 years.

"Having confidence in oneself and knowing you can accomplish what you want by keeping a positive attitude. . . is so important," she says.

After the divorce, she "sold everything" and saved her dinner theater earnings to visit family in Australia, knowing it was her last chance to see her mother. Although she found work in Melbourne and stayed three months, Creamer could not bear living so far from her children.

"I came back the cheapest way I could find," she says, "by ship and Greyhound bus to Norfolk, where friends from the church met me – very bedraggled! All I had left was \$200 in my pocket to get started all over again."

At a retreat for divorced women, Creamer befriended some Richmonders, and began visiting the area.

Ready for a change, she moved from Tidewater in 1973 and took on a job with the first of three Richmond law firms. She also sang in church choirs at Second Presbyterian and River Road Baptist Church; took Mini-Med School classes and riding lessons (becoming a board member for the Richmond Mounted Squad); mastered a Coast Guard sailing course and served her second husband, Bob Creamer, as first mate on his sailboat. Married in 1980, the couple had only a short time together before Bob died four years later.

## **Rocking On**

Dancing remained her passion and physical outlet, and she eventually went on to compete with the Regency Dance Academy.

"I had such joy when I danced," she says longingly, wincing as she relates the story of the torn hamstring that ended her dance career. "It almost killed me," she says of the injury -- though it failed to keep her off her feet for long. From water walking in the Y pool she moved to water aerobics, and finally, to the walking and pilates she practices today. "I would be running if I could!"

Five years ago, she encountered another setback: a job lay-off. In her late 70s, she was out of work for 10 months. "I was so bored!" she recalls. Buying a computer, she sent out resumes to her many contacts in the legal profession, and landed the position at Williams Mullen – adding, in the process, to her growing fan club.

"At work," she says, "they tell me they don't know how I do it. But I just don't like to sit still. You have to keep moving and not dry up."

Another fan is her Tuckahoe Y Training Team coach, Dan Blankenship.

"At 82," Blankenship says of Creamer, "she sets the bar for anyone saying they cannot participate in the program. Lois is a great lady and good motivator for our team."

In addition to the 10K in April, Creamer looks forward to Virginia Beach's Shamrock half marathon in March – and of course a

repeat of the Rock 'n' Roll.

"I plan to do this as long as I'm living," Creamer emphasizes. "There are not enough hours in the day for me to do everything I want to do.

"Stay tuned for the next!"

*For information about the YMCA 10k Training Team, call 285-9495 or visit [www.Sportsbackers.org](http://www.Sportsbackers.org). Non-YMCA members are encouraged to participate.*