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Devoted Alumna, former S.C. First Lady Lois Rhame West Passes Away

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Devoted Alumna, former S.C. First Lady Lois Rhame West Passes Away

Quick Facts

- Lois West campaigned statewide in her husband's gubernatorial race and became an authoritative voice for physical education during the couple's tenure as Governor and First Lady from 1971-75.
- She was a 40-year member of the Board of Directors of The Muscular Dystrophy Association of America (MDA) and served two terms as chair, being the first woman to do so.



Lois Rhame West '43

ROCK HILL, S.C. - **Lois Rhame West '43**, a trailblazer who accumulated many "firsts" to her credit and inspired Winthrop University, South Carolina and the nation to higher standards in wellness, physical fitness and health care policy, passed away on Tuesday, May 6, at her home on Hilton Head Island.

Lois, the widow of the late **Gov. John C. West**, was born in Camden, South Carolina, on Sept. 5, 1921, and graduated from Camden High School in 1939 and then Winthrop College in 1943 where she was the first married student to graduate from the institution.

Even among the distinctive Class of 1943, Lois was a stand-out, playing field hockey, tennis and golf. She obtained her undergraduate degree in physical education and taught at the University of South Carolina while her husband completed law school.

"All of our Winthrop alumni are special, but Lois Rhame West exemplified the best characteristics of a Winthrop graduate. She was loyal to her alma mater, generous with her time and her talents, and a true friend to her classmates. She cared deeply about Winthrop and will be greatly missed by the Winthrop family," said **Winthrop President Jamie Comstock Williamson**.

Lois West campaigned statewide in the gubernatorial race and became an authoritative voice for physical education during the couple's tenure as Governor and First Lady from 1971-75. Subsequently, she served as a true partner in diplomacy with her husband abroad when he was appointed **U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia** where Lois made strides in promoting the acceptance of women in leadership roles.

She was a 40-year member of the Board of Directors of **The Muscular Dystrophy Association of America** (MDA) and served two terms as chair, being the first woman to do so. Her numerous civic contributions also included service as a trustee on the **S.C. Museum Commission**, president of the **West Foundation** (a scholarship program named for Gov. West), a volunteer with both the **Cub Scouts** and the **Girl Scouts**, a life member of the **Camden Garden Club**, a former member of the Hilton Head Advisory Board of the **National Bank of South Carolina**, and founder of a horticulture and floriculture program at **Midlands Center**, a facility in Columbia that serves adults with mental disabilities.

Lois' belief in education and her love for Winthrop led eventually to determined efforts by both Lois and John West to support the **transformation of Winthrop to a coeducational institution** in the early 1970s. Their actions were one more reflection of a devotion to education as a top priority for all South Carolinians and a pillar of the university's transformation from a woman's college to a

comprehensive teaching university that offers national-caliber academic programs.

The **Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters degree** that Winthrop bestowed upon Lois in 1984 recognized her active involvement in helping others, especially students, to become engaged members of the community, leaders in their fields and citizens of the world.

Lois and her family were among the very first major donors to Winthrop, starting the **Lois Rhame West Scholars program** in the mid-1980s to provide full scholarships to South Carolina residents. Her gift for leadership was especially visible in her role as the co-chair for Winthrop’s first capital campaign, “**A Lasting Achievement**,” an effort that generated gifts exceeding \$30 million and increased scholarships for students, improved academic programs in various fields of study and provided more research opportunities for the faculty. In 2000, Lois was honored as a **Distinguished Alumni in Physical Education** by her alma mater.

In 2008, Winthrop became the home of the **John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy**. Through numerous events and activities the forum encourages students to learn about civic engagement and political issues in the state. Also that same year the university dedicated its **first LEED-certified green building** in Lois’ honor. The **Lois Rhame West Health, Physical Education and Wellness Center** houses administrative offices for the Department of Physical Education, Sport and Human Performance; sport management; recreational services; and an impressive array of fitness amenities.

“Lois embodied the commitment to learning and civic engagement that is at the heart of the Winthrop experience. She championed improving lives through education and her support of Winthrop has touched thousands of South Carolinians,” said **President Williamson**. “We are so proud that Winthrop’s **Lois Rhame West Health, Physical Education and Wellness Center** will stand as a reminder of her impact and legacy to current and future generations of students.”

Lois is survived by her daughter, Shelton W. Bosley (Bill) of Hilton Head Island; a son, John C. West Jr. (Flonnie) of Camden; four grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her husband; a son, Douglas Allen West; a daughter-in-law, Susan B. West; four brothers; and a sister.

A funeral service to celebrate the life of Lois will be held Thursday, May 8, at 2 p.m. at **Bethesda Presbyterian Church** with burial to follow in **Forest Lawn Memorial Park**.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorials be made to the **West Foundation**, P.O. Box 643, Camden, SC 29021, or The **Muscular Dystrophy Association**, 3300 E. Sunrise Drive, Tucson, AZ 85718.

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