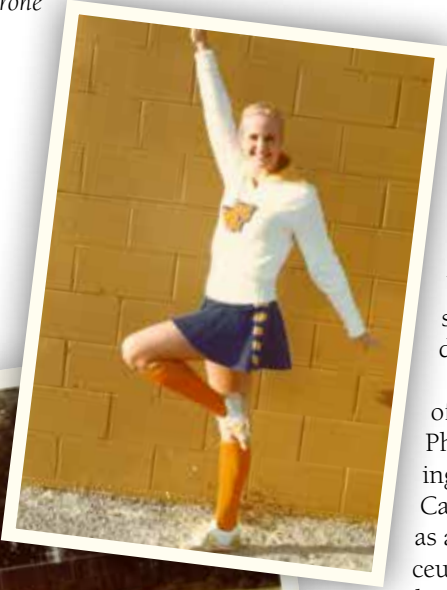




by Jackie Perrone



Lou Kennedy

If you want give an award to Lou Kennedy for community service, you'll have to get in line. She's already received most of the tributes offered in our state, and, because her accomplishments keep piling up, more recognition is definitely likely.

By now, her name rings a bell throughout the Midlands and across the state of Lou Kennedy, as president, chief executive officer, and owner of Nephron Pharmaceuticals Corporation. Lou Wood Kennedy grew up in suburban Lexington and became a product of our local schools and the University of South Carolina. Always running the fast track, she climbed the business ladder rapidly as a marketing and public relations specialist. After she joined Nephron Pharmaceuticals in Florida in 2001, the company embarked on an expansion program that culminated in their finding a permanent home here in Lexington.

"I grew up in a wonderful wooded area off Corley Mill Road," she reminisces. "We had the woods and the river and a neighborhood full of kids who roamed everywhere. When I was about nine years old, I sold vegetables out of our garden. I guess that was the beginning of my marketing career."

Her mother, a first-grade teacher, and her father, an Eastman executive, encouraged their ambitious daughter as she developed her own skills. Now, after 35 years away from home, she is glad to be giving back to her hometown. Nephron Pharmaceuticals opened a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in 2014, in the Cayce-West Columbia Saxe-Gotha Industrial Park off I-77 and, soon afterward, moved its corporate headquarters here from Florida.

After just a few years back on their home turf, Lou and her husband Bill became heavily involved in community service, including establishing the Kennedy Pharmacy Innovation Center at the USC School of Pharmacy. They were named Ambassadors of the Year by the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce in 2013 and the Lexington County Ambassador for Economic Development in 2014. The couple also funded the Kennedy Greenhouse Studio at USC and the William Jerry Wood Life Skills Center at Midlands Technical College. "Jerry Wood - my father - liked to fix things," she explains.

Most recently, she led the ToGetHerThere campaign for the Girl Scouts of South Carolina. A Leadership Center is rising on the banks of the Congaree in Columbia. It will focus on the Girl Scout mission, which is building girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. It is named for the late Cathy Novinger, "a woman who was decades ahead of her time," according to Lou Kennedy.

Lou Kennedy serves on a full range of boards, including the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, where she became chairman in 2018, Midlands Business Leadership Group, the South Carolina Manufacturers Alliance and the USC Athletic Department Board. Her awards include Order of the Palmetto, Citizen of the Year in Cayce-West Columbia, and inclusion in the 50 Most Influential for four years. Coastal Carolina University awarded her the Inspiring Women Award in 2017. Lou and Bill have three adult children and four grandchildren. ■